

S E R M O N S.  
On Several IMPORTANT  
PRACTICAL SUBJECTS.  
IN  
TWO VOLUMES.

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By the late Reverend and Learned  
JOSEPH HOOLE, M.A. *K*  
Rector of St. ANN's, in *Manchester*.

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VOL. I.

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M D C C X L V I I I.



2 R M O N S

45th IMPRINT

EXACTICAN SUBJECTS

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tered,

## ADVERTISEMENT.

téred, or expunged, if the discourses had had the Author's finishing hand put to them. There may be likewise here and there a small inaccuracy, occasioned by blurs, elisions, and contractions, in the manuscript, which may stand in need of an apology. But it was judged the best, upon the whole, for the editor to give them to the public as he found them; and to recommend himself rather for the fidelity of a transcriber, than the exactness of a critic.

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S E R M O N I.  
ON THE  
Existence *of* G O D;  
WITH THE  
PRACTICAL IMPROVEMENT  
OF THAT  
D O C T R I N E.

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VOL. I.

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SERMON  
 SERMON  
 ON THE  
 Existence of God



I have been told that the  
 for entering into the  
 OF THAT  
 argument, in a place where it is  
 to be expected that anyone  
 is familiar with the principles that are  
 stated in it. But as we may possibly  
 with such in the world, and in  
 understand, is a sort of all others the most  
 serious and most convincing as it  
 the rock of Religion and morality  
 obligations to private or local virtue  
 that are needed, not only to our schools  
 but to the world of civility and

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# S E R M O N I.

HEBREWS xi. 6.

*He that cometh to God must believe that he is; and that he is a Rewarder of them that diligently seek him.*

**I** Ought perhaps to make some apology for entering into a discourse upon this argument, in a place where it is hardly to be supposed, that any one is present who is tinctured with the principles that are obviated in it. But as we may possibly meet with such in the world; and as Atheism, or Infidelity, is a pest of all others the most dangerous, and most contagious, as it strikes at the root of Religion, and dissolves all our obligations to private or social virtue; as it proposes no other motives to our actions than secular interest, or convenience; and provided

4 *Of the Existence of GOD. Ser. I.*

it can but keep well with this world, get enough of it, and stay long enough in it, is altogether unconcerned about another; and especially as practical Atheism is but too common, and every where to be observed: It may not be amiss briefly to consider the arguments, by which we are led to confess the Being of a GOD; and the great boldness and absurdity of those, that affect to argue against his existence; and to convince Them of the greatest folly, and most desperate madness, who cannot but confess there is a GOD, and yet live as without GOD in the world; as if he were no other but a bare name, and would never enter into judgment with them.

The apostle in these words declares for the necessity of believing this first and grand article of all Religion; *He that cometh to GOD*, that is, he that would take upon himself that profession of Religion, which is of all others the most reasonable service to GOD, *must believe that he is*, that he exists, and has as certain and real a Being as we ourselves have, but in a more perfect manner. He must believe that he *is*: But what must he believe him to *be*? What, but a Being

Ser. 1. *Of the Existence of God.* 5

of infinite extent, of infinite duration, of infinite perfections! That he is a self-existent, eternal, and unchangeable Spirit, of unsearchable wisdom, boundless power, unspotted holiness, inflexible justice, infinite goodness, and infallible truth: That he is a GOD, on whose divine influences our very being, and all the comforts of our lives, depend; That he is our Creator, and Preserver, our Sovereign LORD; to whom our most perfect obedience, and best services, are ever due; That he is the *Fountain* of all goodness, the *Origin* of all power; and that as all other beings are the work of his hands, so do all their faculties, powers, and perfections, depend upon him: That he is the Governor of the universe, to whom all the angels in heaven, all the devils in hell, and all the men upon earth, are absolutely subject; and can do nothing but what he directs, and orders; what he assists, or what he permits to be done: That he is in all, above all, and beyond all; That he is more intimately present with us, both day and night, than our souls are with our bodies; That he is a sure Refuge and Defence for us to retreat to, in all times of temptation



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and distress, of danger and extremity; That he is All we want, All we can wish, or desire.

It is the proof of this great article of Religion that I shall, in *this* discourse, insist upon; and improve it, by shewing what practical reflections offer themselves from it, in *another*.

1. And, first, to convince ourselves that there is a GOD, we need but turn our eyes and reflections upon the creation of the world, nay, even upon the smallest particle of matter in the whole system.

Every one must grant, that no creature could make itself; for, upon that supposition, this absurdity would follow, *viz.*

That such a creature must exist, and not exist, at the same time. If therefore we enquire how any particular creature, or the whole system of the creation, came into being, we shall of necessity be led to a First Cause, neither made, nor created, the Author and Maker of every other thing; and that is GOD.

2. The government of the world affords us another argument for the existence of a Deity.

Let

Ser. 1. *Of the Existence of God.* 7

Let us consider the globe upon which we live, with all the variety of vegetables and animals which it supports; let us reflect upon the constant returns of light and darkness, summer and winter, seed-time and harvest; let us consult the history of past ages; and we shall plainly perceive, that a Being of the most consummate wisdom and power, has governed and directed the affairs of mankind, and preserved the various species of animals and vegetables ever since the creation. Let us consider the beautiful order and variety, the magnitude and motions, of the heavenly bodies, and we shall discover such things as will puzzle all human wisdom and philosophy to account for, without supposing some great and mighty Being, who guides and directs them to serve his wise and most excellent designs.

The histories of prophecies and miracles, and the most surprising and extraordinary events, serve also to convince us, that there is a most wise and powerful Being, by whom the whole world is governed and preserved.

Have things been foretold thousands of years before they happened, and persons before they existed? Have these prophecies

8      *Of the Existence of God.* Ser. I.

been preserved thro' all intermediate ages, and at last, in their precise season, exactly accomplished, both as to the substance, and the minutest circumstances? Then we must conclude, that there is some wise and mighty Being, who sees into futurity, and knows what will happen to the last period of time, and has been pleased to communicate these things to mortals. Have we ever heard of things being done beyond, nay, contrary to, the course and order of nature? Has ever the motion of the heavenly bodies been arrested? Has the sea been divided, and opened a way for troops and armies to pass through? Have sick persons been healed, or the dead raised by the speaking of a word? All this plainly shews, that some mighty Being, who over-rules all the powers of nature, has displayed his amazing power, by suspending, hastening, or retarding, their motions; by reviving forms, or restoring habits, after their intire privation, or extinction: And this great Being is God.

We no otherwise appeal to the Scripture for the proof of *this* article, than as it is a most authentic register of *such* transactions and events; against which none,  
that

Ser. I. *Of the Existence of God.* 9

that will allow of human testimony, will attempt to argue. No reason is to be urged against well-attested facts; these are arguments that over-rule all opposition.

Now in these records we read what methods God took in former ages, to convince the world both of his existence, unity, and supremacy. After he had created the universe, he gave the world an additional and wonderful proof of his being, and power, and justice, in the deluge of waters, by which the old world was destroyed, for their impieties and vice.

The confusion of languages was an effect, that, in all its circumstances, gave a pregnant proof of the superintendency of Providence, and was a demonstration of his wisdom, as well as power, and justice: for by this means the people dispersed themselves into all parts of the habitable world; and a check was given to the ambitious designs of those that affected an universal empire; and mankind was divided into several monarchies, which was the occasion of many good laws, and made way for the exercise of many great and public virtues; and the world has never been without institutions of wise and religious



10 *Of the Existence of God. Ser. I.*

gious states, in one part of it or another. By this separation of families, the descendants of *Shem* and *Japhet* were, in a great measure, preserved from the infection, that was begun in the family of *Ham*: and when one state degenerated from the true faith and fear of God, and lost the sense and love of virtue, other states were made the instruments of heaven in chastising them. And thus a way was opened for many various and beautiful scenes of Providence in the government of the world.

But yet the variety of languages, and separation of the people, was no small occasion of the people's falling by degrees into the idolatrous worship of variety of gods. Whether the craft and knavery of men passed the cheat upon the weaker sort, who we may well suppose were assisted by the great deceiver; or whether it was to gratify their senses, that they so easily ran into the notion of visible deities; or whether their scanty or imperfect notions of God made way for it, and thinking the province of governing the world exceeded the capacity of any *one* being, they began to appropriate the deity to a country, and persuade themselves that every

Ser. 1. *Of the Existence of God.* 11

every state had its proper and distinct divinity; or, by what means soever such notions of deity were formed and entertained, it is matter of fact, that soon after this *confusion*, a multiplicity of gods was introduced, and idolatry broke out in various shapes and forms, and by degrees became the reigning sin of the world.

To the end therefore that the sense of the true God might not be intirely lost, God chose out one family, with which he entered into a special covenant; the substance of which was, That He should be their God, and They should be his people: they should adhere to Him, and worship Him only, and He would bless them, and let all the world see, that as they bore a peculiar relation to Him, so he was able to do much more for them, than any of the gods of the nations were able to do for those that served them: and by all his providences about them it appeared, that the great thing which he had in view, was, to preserve and propagate the knowlege and worship of the one true God, the God of *Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob*, the God of the *Hebrews*, the supreme and only God. And therefore when he gave them

12 *Of the Existence of GOD.* Ser. I.

them a law, he not only gave them proper rules for their treatment of one another, and for the performance of divine worship, but he so contrived it, that it might keep them separate and distinct from all other people; and lead all thinking men to compare it with the laws of other nations, and thereby discover the superior wisdom of the Lawgiver. But whether *they* would become proselytes to it or no, his own people were obliged always to adhere to it, and never to espouse, and practise after, the rites and religion of any other country, but their own. They would frequently see idols, and hear of other gods, that were worshipped in the nations round about; but they were precluded, by a solemn and express precept, that stood in the front of the moral law, from paying their worship and adoration to any of them. The true and living GOD was to be the sole object of their worship: and so long as they stedfastly adhered to Him, and kept themselves free from idolatry, success attended their arms, their seasons were healthful and fruitful, and all their affairs went prosperously on.

But

Ser. 1. *Of the Existence of God.* 13

But when they departed from the LORD, and served and worshipped other gods, to which for many ages there seemed to be an amazing propensity in them; GOD always punished them; sometimes by delivering them into the hands of their enemies, and at other times by his own immediate visitations; and thereby convinced both them, and all that observed the course of his providence about them, of his great concern for them, and of his superiority over all the gods of the heathen; who, when they worshipped them with ever so great zeal, were not able to protect them from his displeasure, nor from any of the dreadful effects of his jealousy and indignation.

In a word, it appears from these faithful records of the most wonderful effects and providences, that there is a GOD, who not only created the universe, but continually superintends all its affairs, and governs the whole creation.

3. We may add the consent of mankind, as an argument to establish the same truth.

It was long since observed by the great *Roman Orator*, that there was no nation so barbarous as not to acknowledge a Deity.—

And



14 *Of the Existence of God.* Ser. I.

And although a great part of the world has been, since his time, discovered; yet it must be granted, that few, if any, exceptions can to this day be found to his observation.

But where it has been thought that the inhabitants of any considerable extent of country live without religion, or the sense of a Deity; it has been also observed, that they lived without laws, without learning, without arts and manufacture, without towns or habitations, without navigation or commerce, or husbandry; that they were sunk into brutality, and could hardly be accounted a part of our species. And yet it cannot be properly said, that these deny the existence of a God; it is a point that never fell under their examination or reflection; and therefore does not invalidate the argument, drawn from the universal consent of all reasonable creatures.

Now, how should this happen, unless we suppose, either that every man, by considering the wonderful effects of infinite wisdom and power, which shine over the whole creation, is led to the knowledge of the great Maker and Governor of the universe? or, that, at the beginning of the world, his Be-

Ser. I. *Of the Existence of God.* 15

ing and Perfections were discovered to mankind by some extraordinary revelation, and they took care to transmit the notion of him to their posterity? And thus every generation, as it rose up, was instructed in the rational method of inferring the Cause and Author of all things, from the wonderful effects of his power, wisdom, and goodness.

4. We may add to these arguments the testimony of every man's Conscience.

Could those that are most inclined so to do, argue themselves out of the belief of a Deity, what need they to be so startled ever and anon at the voice of their consciences? How come these so frequently to recoil upon them, when they keep their wickedness out of sight, and have none but these tormenting and troublesome consciences to be their accusers? What is it that terrifies them after the committing of any secret villainies, but an inward conviction that an unseen and powerful Deity is conscious both to their hearts and actions; and will at last "bring to  
"light the hidden things of darkness, and  
"make manifest the counsel of the heart, and  
"bring every secret thing into judgment,  
"whether

16 *Of the Existence of God. Ser. I.*

“whether it be good or bad?” For which reason the author of the book of *Wisdom*, in discoursing upon the insupportable pangs and terrors of conscience, says, That whilst the wicked are supposed to commit their sins with all possible secrecy, yet no privacy of their wickedness can keep them from fear; because “wickedness, condemned by her own witness, is very timorous, and, being pressed with conscience, always forecasteth grievous things.” These terrors haunt and pursue them, and render the lives of such as can charge themselves with grievous and flagrant crimes, a very hell of torment and distraction. And this, not with regard to any scrutiny which they can fear from mortals, but to the displeasure of an offended Deity, that will hereafter enter into judgment with them.

How comes it that those, who are advanced to the highest stations of human life, who need not dread the animadversions of any earthly power, have been so terrified with their own thoughts and reflections, but that they presage dismal things, in passing a strict inquiry at a tribunal infinitely superior to their own? And they are not able, tho’  
ever

Ser. I. *Of the Existence of God.* 17

ever so desirous, to extinguish the sense of a Deity, the great "King of kings, and Lord of lords, who does from his throne behold all the dwellers upon earth."

It is possible that those who are haunted with the most dreadful expectations and apprehensions of the punishment that is due to their guilt, may, by vain conversation with those of their own class, by wine, or mirth, or business, divert or hush, for a little while, the clamours of their consciences: But retirement or sickness awaken their uneasy and tormenting reflections; and, tho' they will not confess it, they cannot but dread the divine inspection of their vicious lives, and the strict and solemn judgment to which they must at last be summoned. So that these fears are a plain argument, and confession, that they still have some notions of a superintending Divinity.

These are the arguments, This is the evidence, upon which we believe the Existence of God.

But nothing in religion can be so plain and certain, as to prevent all cavil; nothing can be so evident, but impiety and profaneness, pride, and affectation of Free-thinking, will have something to start, some doubts,



18 *Of the Existence of God. Ser. i.*

some objections to make against it. And this is true in the present case; forasmuch as we do not see God, some will hardly be convinced that there is one. But which of those, that make this a difficulty, ever saw his own soul; yet doubts of its existence? Which of them ever saw the air we breathe in? Yet what more certain than that our lives are preserved by it? As to the former, they will say, They are conscious to themselves that there is a thinking, reasoning substance within them, which, by its acts and operations, discovers its existence: and as to the latter, it is evident from a thousand effects, experiments, and observations, that it is a real, though not a visible substance. And may we not say the same of God? He is no more an object of sight, as he is a Spirit, than the Air, or the Soul of man; but neither is his existence at all less certain; if it be not the most certain of all things, to minds disposed to receive the truth.

Do we not see the effects of his power, and wisdom, and goodness, every moment? Do we not see his lightnings, and hear him speak very frequently in storms and thunder? Do not our souls and bodies, does not the whole

Ser. I. *Of the Existence of God.* 19

whole creation, nay, does not the least part of it, prove his existence? Does not the order which he preserves amongst such variety of jarring elements, and principles; do not prophecies and miracles; does not the consent of mankind; nay, do not the voice and testimony of our own conscience; sufficiently convince us, that there is a God that made us, that inspects our lives, and will at last bring us into judgment?

But the Nature and Essence of God is what we cannot understand: no, nor do we understand the Nature and Essence of any of his creatures. Do we pretend, that it is a difficult thing to form any notion of a Spirit? And may we not as well say, that it is also a very hard thing to understand the nature and essence of Body or Matter? What do we know more of it, than that it has such properties or qualities as render it the object of our senses? We see it moved and extended; we feel it hard or heavy, hot or cold; we are sensible of the various qualities residing in it: but what it is that is the subject in which they reside; what the *substratum* of these properties and accidents; we no more understand, than we know

20 *Of the Existence of GOD. Ser. I.*

the essences of those parts of ourselves, that *think* and *will*, that *like* and *dislike*; that are susceptible of passions and impressions, which, as to the *modus* or manner of them, are as great mysteries in Nature, as any in Religion.

So, though we understand not the essence of GOD, yet, from the effects of his wisdom, and power, and justice, and goodness, which we observe every moment of our lives, we are no less certain of his existence and perfections, than we are of the being and properties of the most plain and obvious parts of nature.

But others, from the observations they make here below, pretend, they may conclude there is no GOD above. If there were, would he not punish such wicked doers as all the world condemn, and would punish, if they could? Would he not also reward the good, that are frequently exposed to oppression and tyranny, and that for the sake of their virtue? Were there a GOD, would he not appear for one, and against another, as good men would do, were it in their power? This is a common objection against GOD's Providence,

Ser. I. *Of the Existence of God.* 21

dence, and will come to be considered under that head: At present, let it suffice to observe;

As there are persons in the world who are equally inclined and able to protect the innocent, and reward the virtuous; as there are laws and magistrates to vindicate such as are injured and oppressed; it may be one intention of Providence, to refer both good men and bad to their animadversion. It is also to be considered, that God makes both good and bad men the instruments of his own Providence, and in his wisdom sometimes sees fit to let the wicked go on unpunished, and good men unrewarded, to answer his own wise and worthy, though secret, designs and purposes, and to serve at last to set off his Providence in the most admirable and amiable light: I say, *at last*; for there will come a state and time, in which God will display his justice and goodness, in rewarding the virtuous, and punishing the wicked, to the intire satisfaction of men and angels.

So that those that are not punished and rewarded here, may promise themselves that hereafter they shall be treated "according to ' their works, whether they be good or evil."



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S E R M O N II.  
ON THE  
Existence *of* G O D;  
WITH THE  
PRACTICAL IMPROVEMENT  
OF THAT  
D O C T R I N E.

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## S E R M O N II.

HEBREWS xi. 6.

*He that cometh to God must believe  
that he is; and that he is a Rewarder  
of them that diligently seek him.*

**F**ROM which words I proposed to consider the proofs that we have of the Existence of a GOD; which were the argument of my last discourse.

Now, if the existence of GOD be so evident, we may infer the great imprudence and folly, weakness and credulity, of those that banish GOD, and with Him all hopes of heaven and a blessed futurity.

Is not that man weak and foolish, that wilfully renounces his own happiness, and rejoices to think, that after he has acted a short part here, he shall quit the stage, and  
never



26 *Of the Existence of God.* Ser. 2.

never appear again, any more than the beasts that perish?

But this is what the Atheist does: He might partake of the common hopes of future happiness, that will never end; but, instead of that, he pleases himself with the thoughts of being intirely deprived of all his powers and faculties, and of having his Being quite extinguished.

What should we say of him that had a friend well affected to him, and ready to do great kindness for him, and settle an estate upon him, that would furnish him with every thing he wants or wishes, and yet he is not to be persuaded, by all that he has already done for him, that he has any such friend, or that he intends him any such favour, or has any such to bestow, and pays not the least respect to him? The same may we say of the Atheist. There is a God who truly loves mankind, to whom every individual is peculiarly dear; and it is his intention to settle us all in another world in the highest circumstances we can desire or imagine: and yet this man will not believe, after a thousand instances of his kindness and favour,

Ser. 2. *Of the Existence of God.* 27

favour, that there is any such being, or any such state and felicity.

Is not he weak and imprudent that gives ear and credit to a man that degrades him, and tells him that he is not well descended, and checks his hopes and expectations, assuring him that he shall never arrive at that happiness which he may reasonably promise himself; who tells him, That he sprang out of the earth no body knew how, and must shortly sink into it again, and never have any more consciousness of his own existence? Should we not think a man defective in his senses and reason, that should tell us, that there was no sun in the firmament, by whose heat he was warmed, and by whose light he was guided; and persisted in his assertion, against all the demonstration of our senses? And he may as well do this, as deny that there is a God in heaven. Would not he be censured for the folly of his expectations, that would neither till nor sow his land, and yet expected a rich spontaneous crop? Was it ever heard in our degenerate days, that the earth did of itself produce all manner of grain, and fruits, without any care or culture? But, as ridiculous and improbable as all

28 *Of the Existence of God. Ser. 2.*

all this would be, the Atheist tells us a story that by many degrees exceeds it; to wit, That all the world above and about us was the result and effect of mere chance and accident. What should we expect from a man that could not distinguish one letter from another, and yet spent his time in picking out *types*, and putting them together at all adventures, without direction, without the assistance of common and ordinary instruction? But would it not be equally absurd to conceive, that he should range them in such an order, as to compose a fine poem, or the life of one of the patriarchs, or of *Alexander* the great, or of *Julius Cæsar*; as to believe, that this beautiful frame of the world should have started into such a state by mere casualty; and that the inhabitants of this globe were not formed by a wise Creator, but sprung out of the earth like trees and flowers?

Should one that observed the dissection of a human body, and was shewn the uses of the several parts and organs, their curious contexture, their aptitude and fitness to do their respective offices, all conspiring for the preservation of the animal life; should he gravely say, It was a lucky chance that such a curious

Ser. 2. *Of the Existence of God.* 29

rious body was formed; and assert, that it was done without any design or contrivance; we should conclude that either such a man was crazed, or thought us so. Even *Galen*, a Heathen, contemplating the beauty and harmony of the human frame, is said to have been so affected with the wisdom of the contrivance, that he could not but confess the existence of a wise and powerful Divinity; and composed a hymn in praise of his Maker.

Should a man find a statue form'd with exquisite beauty and elegance, as he was travelling over a desert, or digging in his mines or quarries, and should think and affirm, that it either form'd itself, or was accidentally produced, he would be thought sufficiently silly and credulous. But what is a fine statue, in comparison of the most curious and beautiful system of the universe? And who, but one void of understanding and reflection, could ever affirm, or imagine, that the whole of that was no more than the effect of mere chance and casualty? Nay, a hundred, and a thousand cases might be put, all and every one of which would convince us, that an Atheist is of all mortals the most weak and credulous.

But



30 *Of the Existence of God. Ser. 2.*

But perhaps those that are sensible of the Improbability and absurdity of the *Epicurean* hypothesis, will rather join with the *Aristotelians*, and assert the Eternity of the World in its present form : But this scheme is as far from being probable, or tenable, as the former.

To say, there have been eternal generations of men, or successions of other animals; that they have produced one another in an eternal progression, without any dependance upon an Original or First cause; To say, that every generation should be dependent on the former, and that the whole should be dependent on nothing, are such absurdities, as one would very much wonder to hear seriously asserted: and against which we may argue from matter of fact, most unanimously agreed upon by those, that have been strict and curious in their observations; and that is, the gradual increase of mankind, which appears from the sacred history of the *Jewish* church, or the civil accounts of the *Roman Census*, or the observations made in our own times and countries; whence we are informed, that births are to burials as five to four.

But

2. Ser. 2. *Of the Existence of God.* 31

But if the increase were no more than one in a hundred, or in a thousand; or if births were to burials as five thousand to four thousand nine hundred and ninety-nine; if the increase were no more than one in one hundred, or a thousand years; yet, upon the supposition of an eternal succession, the world must have been over-stock'd with inhabitants long before this time.

Shall we say, that earthquakes and deluges, plagues and pestilences, wars and famines, have swept the stage, and left the few remains to begin the world again? These devastations then must have been infinite, or no argument can be drawn from them. And if we say these fall out supernaturally, this is to give up the cause, and assert a Deity: if otherwise, in an ordinary and natural way, it will puzzle the most improved philosopher to make it out, from any known laws and observations of nature.

And to suppose the universality of these wastes and destructions of mankind, and the infinite repetitions of the same, it will be difficult to imagine, that they have been so near being total, and yet never reached it. Besides, the Luminaries of the heavens, upon  
this

32 *Of the Existence of God. Ser. 2.*

this supposition, must long ago have been extinguished by their constant expence of light; and how new ones should be lighted up, or the old ones should have new matter supplied, is a point we may leave to be explained by those that are so hardy as to assert it.

Further still; On this hypothesis of the eternity of the world, there must have been infinite revolutions of the earth and moon, and the rest of the planets, though one is twelve, or twenty, or a hundred times longer in performing its revolution than another; and so one infinite would be greater or less than another; or rather, one of these revolutions would not exceed another, but the less would be equal to the greater: Both which are absurd; yet equally follow from this hypothesis.

But, setting aside such kind of arguments as these, it has been observed by the greatest of our writers, that the uneven surface of the earth, the growth of stones, and other ossaceous or mineral substances, do all contribute to prove the earth no other than *Moses* represents it, far from being eternal. And if, to take off the force of the argument drawn from these manifest and allowed observations,

Ser. 2. *Of the Existence of God.* 33

servations, recourse be had to any thing within the power of nature, it will be necessary to assert, that the same methods have been taken times beyond the power of numbers to reckon up: and to this difficulty another is to be added, and that is, to account for the dissolution of the harder bodies, and the throwing up of new mounts, after the sinking or depression of the former.

To insist no longer upon arguments against the eternity of the world; the known original of nations, and the late invention, and daily improvement, of arts and sciences, are a proof of its novelty, and that its *beginning* is to be carried no farther back than the *Jewish* historian has set it. But I must not forget, that my business here is not to dispute, but to instruct; and therefore, having freed the subject from the seeming arguments that are brought against it, and upon which there is no occasion to enlarge any further,

I proceed to what I first promised; *viz.* for the use of unlearned and common hearers, to shew what relation this truth of the Existence of a Deity has to our practice.

2dly, Religion stands upon a very sound  
D basis,



### 34 *Of the Existence of God. Ser. 2.*

basis, and is the most reasonable thing in the world. It is founded upon the existence and authority of God, and fixes and settles man's mind in present ease and tranquillity, and gives it the most comfortable hopes and expectations.

But Atheism is, on the contrary, the most unreasonable; it has no principles to fix upon, and leaves the mind in a restless fluctuation and uncertainty. It is not able to give any tolerable account of the production of the world, but either asserts the eternity of it, both as to the matter and form, or present frame of it, as those of the school of *Aristotle*; or else, that the matter of it being eternal, after its minute parts had floated about at random, in space without bounds, and time without measure, they did, by mere accident, fall into that beautiful order, in which we now see, and so justly admire it; which is the way that the *Epicureans* take to account for it. But both one and the other of these schemes is full of absurdity, which no philosopher is able to defend. This has been made out to the satisfaction of all the reasonable part of mankind, at divers times, and by various authors;

Ser. 2. *Of the Existence of God.* 35

but by none with more advantage of wit, and truth, and sound reasoning, than by Archbishop *Tillotson*, in a Sermon, shall I call it? or tract, which has the substance of many volumes in it, and stands in the front of that collection of his Sermons published in his life, that has so much reputation both amongst *Englishmen* and foreigners. In this Sermon he has fully exposed the folly of speculative atheism, as from various other topics, so especially from this; *viz.* That it gives a poor, unphilosophical, and unsatisfactory account of the origin and form of the universe, without any regard to the wisdom and power of the Deity, from which it derived its existence.

3dly, The principles that follow from the supposition of a Deity, form a more comfortable scheme than those of the atheist. The former supports the mind under all the pressures of *this* state, and fills it with the glorious hopes of eternal felicity in *another*: the latter leaves us to contend with all the miseries and afflictions, the troublesome events and misfortunes of the present life, purely by our own strength, without suggesting or allowing that the least assistance is

36 *Of the Existence of God.* Ser. 2.

to be derived and expected from heaven; and as for any hope of a better in a future state, this is quite discarded; and we are as much without hope, while we pay any respect to their doctrines, as they are without God in this world.

And into what a comfortless state would this throw us! in what darkness would it involve us! who in our bodies and minds, our fortunes and all our concerns, are liable to such disappointments and distresses; and have no hopes, after we have struggled with them all the term of our lives here, that any better scene will open hereafter?

Their doctrine proposes nothing but the joyless thoughts of annihilation after this life, to those who have met with one continued train of vexations in it. But if we believe that there is a God, who is wise and holy, just and powerful, and whose perfections are, like his nature, infinite; we shall not be depressed with the greatest difficulties here, nor despair of lasting happiness hereafter. It is of the greatest consequence to be well satisfied of this truth; for, as it gains or loses credit, our lives will be under better or worse influences.

The

Ser. 2. *Of the Existence of God.* 37

The believer thinks himself bound to live like one that has well-grounded hopes of immortal life and happiness: the unbeliever has no such hopes; and therefore thinks himself under no such obligations; and both of them are highly interested in their respective schemes, and, from their state and condition, are led to hope that they will prove true. The former does every part of his duty, in hopes of pleasing God; and whether he is prosperous or unfortunate, happy or miserable, in the opinion of mankind here, he hopes it will be well with him hereafter. The other has taken such liberties as he thinks a Deity cannot approve of; and therefore, for his own ease, he endeavours to persuade himself there is no such being: he is afraid there should be one, and therefore hopes there is none.

So that, in reality, mens fears and prejudices did not first produce a Deity, but, on the contrary, their product was atheism. They could not support the thoughts of a being, that is infinitely wise and holy, just and powerful, and therefore they endeavoured to laugh and argue him out of the world. And so it is still: their liberties are



38 *Of the Existence of God.* Ser. 2.

forbidden by the law of God, and therefore they disown his authority.

Were their practice laid under no restraint, were heaven their birthright, and happiness entailed upon them without any terms or conditions, we should have no atheists in the world.

They would subscribe to the twelve articles of the *Creed*, could they get rid of the *Ten Commandments*: for which reason it is not any great wonder, that libertines in practice should espouse atheistical principles.

The wonder is, to find a man that appears to be modest and regular, well-nurtured and good-natured; one that regards all social and relative duties; is a friend to mankind, and useful to the world; that such a man should be, or affect to be thought, unsatisfied about the existence of a Deity, or any incorporeal essence, the immortality of the soul, and a future state; is hard to be accounted for; unless we suppose that there is something unseen to us, that indisposes such an one for judging and reasoning rightly upon those subjects, though he may do it plausibly upon a thousand others. For there seems to be a certain temper and disposition  
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Ser. 2. *Of the Existence of God.* 39

of mind, necessary for being truly sensible of the principles, and subject to the precepts, of Religion.

*4thly*, Since we have so much assurance of the being of God, let us never forget him. That would be the way to bring us into the same state, as if we believed there was no God. The forgetfulness of him will arm and strengthen every temptation; we shall neglect his law, lose sight of his promises, despise his threats, and follow the devices and delusions of our own hearts. We shall have poor and narrow thoughts, shall live by no principles, nor have any views but what relate to these bodies, to this state: we shall have no regard to moral principles, further than they promote our secular interests: we shall deny no appetite, mortify no passion or inclination, which we can gratify without incommoding us in our present state: we shall live and die like the brutes that perish.

But if we keep God in our thoughts, we shall be excited to every useful and worthy action: our lives will be a continued series of devotion, of righteousness, of charity, of moderation: our hearts will be purified,

40 *Of the Existence of God. Ser. 2.*

our aims and views, our principles and intentions, rectified: we shall not be too highly exalted in prosperity, nor depressed in adversity: we shall use our utmost zeal and diligence in God's service; nor shall we be weary of well-doing, but persevere to the last, in hopes that he who requires and observes our faithfulness in his service, will at last abundantly reward us.

*5thly*, If it be so clear and evident that there is a God, what then shall we say to those who pretend not to dispute it, but live as if they had no regard to it? This is living quite out of character; it is giving the lye to themselves, it is known and wilful rebellion.

If those that pretend to believe there is no God, live as if they were not accountable to any, this would not be surprising; it would not contradict their principles; but --- for those that *do* believe to live as those that *do not*, is highly absurd and preposterous.

Could a man persuade himself that there were no laws enacted by our superiors, that there were no judges to take cognizance of his behaviour; it would argue that the man  
was

Ser.2. *Of the Existence of God.* 41

was very much deluded, or that he had strangely imposed upon himself. But if he should, under such sentiments, take his own measures, and live by his own rules, it would not be surprising, would be no contradiction. But for a man that knew there were good laws, and wise and impartial magistrates and judges, and that he would certainly be brought before them, and incur the penalties due to his bad practices; for such a man to give the reins to his lusts, his passions, to do or say any thing, every thing, that he had a mind for, would be surprising, absurd, and wilful. For men that believe a God, to live as if there were no God, confirms others in real atheism, reflects most shamefully, not only upon their profession as Christians, but also upon their sense and reason as men. This is hypocrisy, this is apostasy: no words are strong enough in our language, or any other, to represent the folly of such a conduct. The folly, I say: for would any but a fool do what could be attended with no manner of good, nay, with all manner of mischief and misery? Would any but a mad-man knowingly and wilfully throw himself down a precipice? Who,



42 *Of the Existence of GOD. Ser. 2.*

Who, but one bereft of his senses, would run naked and unarmed upon the point of a sword? or leap into a burning furnace? or throw himself into the raging sea? Nay, it is possible to put a thousand cases, which would each of them bespeak consummate and desperate madness; but impossible ever to think of any, that may be compared with that of living as if there were no God, whilst yet a man pretended to believe there is one.

If there really be a God, it becomes us not only to believe in him, but perform every part of our duty to him. Our faith, without good works, will prove vain and fruitless; it will only give us torment and horror, as it does the fallen angels, who *believe there is one God, and tremble*, and are confounded to think of him, *Ja. ii. 19.* We may think it is not in the power of the devil to tempt us to professed atheism; for, upon all the arguments we meet with every day, we must needs be persuaded there is a God: but what then? It will please him as well, if he can tempt us to live like atheists. He will permit us to hear, and say, and believe, if we please, a thousand fine things of the being, and nature, and providence of  
GOD,

Ser. 2. *Of the Existence of GOD.* 43

GOD, provided that we will but contradict our faith by our works. *Creeds*, and *Confessions*, and *Articles of Faith*, are his diversion, so long as we give the lye to them in our conversation. Nor can he hope to delude us in these days, and countries, as he did the heathen of old, who worshipped a multiplicity of gods: no; we are not so stupid to believe there are, or ever were, or can be, any but the one true and living GOD. True; but he assaults us in another way, and deals more artfully with us. He will not be solicitous to tempt us to think there are more gods than one, if he can but persuade us to put any other thing in the place of GOD, and fear or love and serve it instead of GOD.

For that in the end will be found to be our God, which has taken fastest hold of our hearts and affections, and has taken up most of our thoughts, and care, and service, whether it be the persons, pleasures, or honours of the world. He cares not what it is, though it be our virtue or religion, so we do but put our trust in it, and depend upon it for happiness, exclusive of GOD; because, whatever we treat as GOD is to be treated,

#### 44 *Of the Existence of God.* Ser. 2.

treated, and respect as God ought to be respected, is as really God to us, as any thing, either animate or inanimate, was to the idolatrous heathens.

So that whatever we imagine, by every sin we choose to commit, it is evident that we have got a new God, whom we serve by that sin. Who is the profane swearer's God? or whom does a man please and serve by curses and blasphemies? As this is the religion of hell, it is but too notorious what God is worshipped by it. What does the revengeful and malicious man serve, but his own intemperate and raging passions? What does the adulterer serve but his brutish lusts? And who is the God of the drunkard or glutton, of the man that riots in excess and luxury, but, as the Scriptures determine and express it, his own Belly? Who but *Mammon* is the God of the extortioner and miser, the unjust and covetous? And who is the lyar's God, but the father of lyes? So that, as absurd as *Polytheism* is allowed to be, there is hardly any sin more common; because, whatever we serve and worship, whatever it is to which we devote ourselves, and for the sake of which we employ our time and powers,

making

Ser. 2. *Of the Existence of God.* 45

making it our only or ultimate end; whatever it is to which we sacrifice our faculties or senses, our healths and strength, our lives and fortunes (as a thousand do to the gratification of their lusts, their appetites, their passions, and follies), we make it an idol; and shall at last find ourselves as incapable of defending our practices, as those that worshipped all the variety of Gods that were ever heard of among the heathens.

*6thly*, This manifest and important truth must give great hopes and comfort to all that are good, and equal fear and terror to all wicked men: for God will assuredly reward the one, and punish the other. Justice is essential to him, and must have its course to reward every man according to his works. There is no trusting to divine mercy, whilst men go on in a course of iniquity. Such are not capable subjects, on whom it is to be exercised, to whom it is to be extended: it must be desired, I had almost said deserved, before it is obtained.

I mean no more than this; that all who would hope for divine mercy, must repent, and do works meet for repentance. They must renounce their sins and follies,  
and



46 *Of the Existence of God.* Ser. 2.

and forsake their evil courses; their hearts and lives must be changed; they must, at least in the sincere and stedfast purpose of their souls, renounce the world and the devil, and devote themselves, and all that they have, and can do, to God. We cannot do any thing more contrary to the gospel, than encourage hopes of mercy and salvation, without a thorough change and reformation. And then, whether they have much or little forgiven, their pardon will be secure, and their happiness as certain as their faith in these two principles, *That God is, and that he is a Rewarder of all that diligently seek him.*

SERMON

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SERMON III.

THE  
ATTRIBUTES  
AND  
PERFECTIONS  
OF  
G O D,

A reasonable Ground of Obedience  
to HIM.

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## S E R M O N III.

J O B xxi. 15.

*What is the Almighty, that we should  
serve him ?*

**W**HEN we hear and see the frequent instances of the wickedness and profaneness of the present times, we are apt to conclude, that they are worse than ever went before us. And many ages and countries have been distinguished by better tempers and inclinations, and have had more numerous and signal instances of virtuous characters, than we at present may be acquainted with. There have been intermissions of vice and virtue, ebbings and flowings of ungodliness in the world : and some ages and places have been infamous for vice, and have abounded with persons of a profane



50 *God's Attributes the Ground* Ser. 3.

turn, and profligate and abandoned lives, as examples have been given, or as laws and discipline have been more lax. In the days of this author we find that blasphemy and impiety were carried to a very extraordinary height, when men were so abandoned as not to see, or not to confess, any sense of the nature and perfections of God, which might infer their obligations to serve him: *Job xxi. 15. What is the Almighty, that we should serve him?*

Every man, we must confess, is allowed to inquire into the reasons of things, and especially of those that are urged upon him as his duty; provided that his inquiries are modest, and that he be disposed to receive that satisfaction, which is to be expected in the case. And it must be confessed, that it is a matter of the greatest importance to inquire into the nature and perfections of God; for as we form our notions of him, so shall we serve him. If we represent him to ourselves as one that is ignorant of what passeth here below, or as an idle and unconcerned spectator, or as one that is weak and unable to reward and recompense virtue and vice, we shall then make no great difference

Ser. 3. *of our Obedience.* 51

betwixt one and the other, further than it may suit our humours, convenience, or interest. But if we form our ideas of God according to the rules of reason, assisted by the revelations that God hath made of himself in the Holy Scriptures; we shall find our reverence for him, and care to please him, will rise in proportion to our conceptions of him. And therefore, though the question, as it is proposed, *Job xxi. 15.* by the persons that are here spoken of, appears to have a deep tincture of atheism and infidelity, not unlike that of the king of *Egypt* about the same time, who would not obey the message which God sent him by *Moses*, but said, *Who is the Lord, that I should obey him?* *Exod. v. 2.* in which expostulation it is hard to say, whether the arrogance or impiety, the pride or profaneness, be greater; yet it may give us occasion, with all humility and reverence, to inquire into the perfections of God, and to consider the various and forcible motives that are drawn from his nature and attributes, to engage us to serve the Almighty.

In discoursing upon these words, I will only do these two things:

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*First*, I will shew what it is to serve the Almighty.

*Secondly*, I will lay before you several motives, drawn from the consideration of God's nature and perfections, to solicit our service.

The former head I shall dispatch with more brevity, and be larger upon the latter, because we much better know our duty than we practise it.

Now, as to the first inquiry; We serve God when we imitate him in his moral excellencies: We then serve God when we obey God, and make his precepts the rule of our conversation; when we do the work he hath given us to do; and in all our thoughts, words, and actions, endeavour to engage his favour and approbation: We then serve him, when we worship him with reverence and godly fear; when we govern our thoughts and hearts, our words and actions, by his most just and righteous laws: We serve him, when we devote our time and talents, and all his gifts, to his honour and glory; when we take care that our outward conduct, and inward principles, views, and motives, be such as he will observe with pleasure and  
appro-

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approbation; when we are humble and lowly in his sight; when we act agreeably to what he has made us, and perform the duties of the relations and circumstances in which he has placed us; when we devote ourselves, in the work of our callings and professions, and even in the common actions of our lives, to his service, and propose his honour as the ultimate end of all we do; when every thing we do has a reference to his will, and is an act of obedience to his law; when we do it not only for the credit, or profit and pleasure that attends it; not only because it is for our health, and peace, and interest in the world; not only because it is well thought on by our friends and acquaintance, by the learned, the wise, the great, but because it is agreeable to the law and will of the Almighty; This is what he expects and requires of us.

But whatever the service of God includes, we are not to think that God stands in need of it: no man can be profitable to God, as he may be to his neighbour, or himself: however we live, and whatever we do, God will be the same great, and holy, and happy Being. But of his infinite goodness he is



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pleased to esteem our obedience to his laws, by which we only oblige ourselves, and one another, as a piece of acceptable service to himself. And he is pleased to encourage it, by promising great and eternal rewards to it; provided that in our service of GOD we have a just regard to all GOD's commands, whether of the first or second table; provided that our service be sincere, and that we really be in the sight of GOD, what we would appear to be in the eyes of men; that we not only outwardly seem to serve GOD, but inwardly delight in his service, and prefer his honour and glory to every other interest and consideration; provided that we serve him with a prudent and rational zeal; that we exert ourselves in his service with chearfulness and vigour; and that we persevere therein to the end of our lives; and, the longer we live, endeavour to perform the more perfect and acceptable service to him. Nor are we to esteem the service of GOD Almighty as any abridgment of the liberty, that the best of men, of christians, or saints, could wish for; we are not restrained in any thing, but what is hurtful to ourselves, or others; in nothing but what is  
base

Ser. 3. *of our Obedience.* 55

base and vile, and what we ought to be ashamed to think of; in nothing but what fools, or brutes, or worse, would be guilty of. God's service is no slavery, but the most perfect freedom that men or angels can desire to have.

Let us therefore consider what the Almighty is, and what strong obligations we are under, to perform the most perfect service which we are able to do him. To this purpose let us, in general, observe, that the Almighty is a real, and not an imaginary Being, as infidels or wicked persons affect to represent him. When we consider this vast globe of earth and water, upon which we live; when we view the several parts of which it consists, the numberless curiosities with which both land and water are enriched, and the amazing mountains, rocks, and precipices, that present themselves to sailors and travellers; when we view the glories of the creation, and see innumerable stars sparkle in the firmament, &c. how can we imagine, that all these things could be made without a real, nay, a most perfect Creator, whose power and wisdom exceed the comprehension of the most perfect crea-

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tures? And, to take the hint from a certain Author, let us suppose ourselves travelling in some wild and uncultivated desarts of *Asia* or *Africa*, and that we should there find a statue or picture finished with the utmost art, representing all the parts of a human body, with such life and beauty, justness and proportion, that we are puzzled at some distance to determine whether it be a living person, or only an artificial representation of one: Or let us suppose that we should find a curious engine, with a constant and regular motion representing all the revolutions and appearances of the heavenly bodies, the ebbing and flowing of the sea at its precise periods, together with summer and winter, spring and harvest, in their proper seasons, in all their degrees and advances, decays or variations, from the beginning of the year to the end. Let us suppose that we should also find at the same time a book, writ upon any of these, or any other noble and lofty subject, in which we discovered the most excellent contrivance and beauty, art and judgment: In such a case, I say, let us only consider what we should think of these things; or whether we should not con-

fess

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selfs they were the works of some great artists, or ingenious authors. What then must we think of the Contriver and Creator of the Universe? a work of such exquisite skill and power, as is never to be brought into comparison with the former. How can it be imagined, that a fabrick so grand and magnificent as this great world we live in, should be the effect of chance, or raised by any other than a Being of infinite power and perfections?

We must therefore think ourselves to be under as real obligations to serve the Almighty, as if he appeared in all his glory, assembled all mankind before his throne, and, with a voice at which the earth and heavens bowed and trembled, should, in the most plain and express terms, require us all in general, and every one in particular, to serve and obey him. For that he is not visible to mortal eyes, is no more an argument against his existence, than it is against the existence of the human soul, or of the air in which we breathe; and we cannot be more certain, from the sense we have of the several operations of our souls within us, thinking, willing, judging, reasoning, that they have a real existence;



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existence; nor from the experiments we make of the rarity or density, the dryness or moisture, the weight or lightness of the air, that it is more than an imaginary thing; than we are of the existence and attributes of the Creator and Governor of the Universe, from the works of Creation and Providence, Miracles and Prophecies, and various other plain and undeniable arguments of it.

Let us therefore, which is my Second general Head, proceed, with all reverence, to take a view of his glorious perfections, and consider what forcible arguments rise from thence to solicit our service.

1<sup>st</sup>, The Almighty is an Eternal Being. Let us add one year, nay, one thousand or million of years, to another, as long as it is in our power to do it; and all that duration of time falls infinitely short of God's Eternity, who calls himself the *Alpha and Omega*, *who was, and who is, and who is to come, from everlasting to everlasting, without beginning of days, or end of time.* Now This is the Almighty: And shall we not serve such a God as This, since he lives for ever to reward our services? Shall we be ambitious of serving an earthly sovereign, whose  
life

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life is short, whose reign is uncertain, who may die, or be dethroned, and rendered unable to reward our fidelity? And shall we not serve the eternal God, whose throne is more stable and fixed than the everlasting hills, who endures for ever and ever?

2dly, The Almighty is Infinite and Omnipresent. We know that, as small as their vast distances from us make the sun and stars appear to us, yet most of them are by the learned found to be much larger than the earth; and yet they are only little spots, in comparison of that firmament, in which they continually roll about; and infinitely less, in comparison of that immense space which the Divine presence fills: Let us suppose each of the fixed stars to be like our sun, with its proper set of planets continually moving round it; which, considering the discoveries of philosophy, is no wild or extravagant imagination: Let us enlarge our ideas, and suppose one such world as this above and beyond another, as far as our thoughts can stretch themselves: And yet, what is all this, in comparison of the Divine Immensity? This Almighty Being pervades and actuates, sustains and regulates, the whole frame of nature.

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nature. He is still present with every part, and holds all the creation as a ball in his hand, and is infinitely extended beyond its utmost bounds and extremities. The heaven, and the heaven of heavens, cannot contain the great, the almighty Creator. Now This is the Almighty; and shall we not serve him? Shall we with all diligence and decency serve a master who stands by us? and shall we not serve the Almighty, who is in all places at the same, and at all times?

3dly, The Almighty is a GOD of infinite Knowledge. We observe that the sun constantly enlightens a great part of this lower world, and discovers millions of persons, and their actions, every moment. But all this is far short of GOD's all-seeing eye, that by night, as well as day, pierces through the whole creation, and discovers every thing therein, though wrapped up in secrecy and darkness, as well as we can see what is done at noon-day before our very faces. We cannot so distinctly observe the persons we see and converse with, as GOD continually views all the creatures in the universe. We do not more precisely know what we ourselves do or think, than God knows all the  
secret



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secret thoughts of men and angels, and is acquainted with all the actions and motions in the universe. He who made, must needs understand the peculiar natures and essences, all the powers and properties, all the distinguishing characters of every particular creature. There is no comparison to be made between the knowlege of God, and that of the most improved mortal, or the most glorious seraph. The knowlege of the creature is very slight and superficial, extends but to a few objects, and that very partially and imperfectly; is at best confused and obscure, too oft precarious and uncertain, hard to be attained, and easily lost, liable to ten thousand accidents and misfortunes, which may utterly deface it, and leave the most knowing man distinguished by nothing, but his outward shape, from the lowest brute. And, in short, the greatest of men and angels must confess, that God is infinitely more exalted above them, than they are placed above the lowest insect in the whole creation. The knowlege of God is present and actual; every thing always lies open and naked to his eye: he intimately and familiarly knows every thing; distinctly and clearly perceives



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perceives the most retired and sudden thoughts of the most subtil and politick persons. GOD's knowlege is absolutely certain and infallible: he sees every thing through a constant *medium*; the light of the Divine understanding is always fixed, bright, and certain. The knowlege of GOD is easy and extensive: he understands the very essences of every thing, with less difficulty than we can open our eyes, and look upon the outsides of any thing. In a word, his knowlege is so perfect, that it is neither capable of improvement nor decay. This is the Almighty: And shall we not serve him? If then it would excite us to greater zeal in serving our prince, to be assured that all our good services should be particularly notified to him, shall we not with greater chearfulness and vigour serve the great GOD, who sees, and as perfectly knows every thing we do to please him, as we know it ourselves when we do it?

4<sup>thly</sup>, And as his knowlege is infinite, and his nature perfect, so must his Wisdom be. If *he* would deserve the character of a wise man, who, from the contemplation of the state and posture of things at present, could

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could see the distant consequences of them; or who by reading the histories of past ages, and by the observations he had made of the nature of man, or conduct of providence, could foresee what would fall out in this or the next age, either in ours or any other country; and could so plainly see the dependence of one thing upon another, as the effect upon the cause, that he could direct himself, his friend, or his prince, to those methods which would most successfully tend to the wealth and safety, happiness and prosperity, of himself or his country; What then shall we say of the wisdom of the Almighty, who, forasmuch as he sees all things, past, present, or to come, at once, must needs have the perfect art of adapting means to ends, and of so ordering and disposing things, as to bring about that which to him seems most proper and useful? And therefore is our fear of God, and observance of his laws, submitting our will to his, and governing our lives and actions by the rules which he hath given us, the very best proof of *our* wisdom; and the contrary argues the most consummate stupidity and folly. This is the Almighty: And shall we not serve him,  
since

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since we shall thereby best imitate his heavenly wisdom; forasmuch as by so doing we shall most effectually promote the honour and glory of God, and secure our own peace, and safety, and salvation; than which, we cannot propose more noble and worthy ends?

5thly, He is a GOD of infinite Power. Let us suppose that any Being was able, first to create and form such a world as this we live in, and in a moment to strike it back again into nothing; and yet we cannot conceive or imagine that degree of perfection and quickness with which GOD could do it. When *Moses* is giving us an account of the creation, the expressions he uses are such as give us the most perfect ideas of GOD's power, that we can possibly conceive. *And God said, Let there be light; and there was light.* Whatever God pleaseth to have done in the natural world, is done without delay, without resistance. Whatever implies no contradiction or impossibility in the thing to be done, or weakness, imperfection, or guilt, in the doer, GOD can do it by commanding, nay, by thinking or willing it; for his will is his command, and his command

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mand is not to be resisted. This is the Almighty: And shall we not serve him? Shall we not dread his power, so far as never to dare to offend him? for his power and his wrath are against all that forsake him. Since we desire to serve those that have it in their power to requite us, shall we not serve God, who is able to do more for us than we can ask or think, and, when he sees it convenient, will do it, if we make his pleasure and service our principal care and business?

Now since the LORD our God is so great and glorious, in all both communicable and incommunicable attributes; since he is Eternal, Infinite, and Omnipresent; since his Knowledge and Wisdom are boundless; since his Power is not only transcendent, but absolute and perfect; we see reason sufficient to engage us to fear, and love, and serve him, with all our hearts, and with all our souls: Which is the point I proposed to clear; and which will appear with still greater evidence, as we proceed to consider his other attributes of Purity and Holiness, Justice and Mercy, Truth and Goodness; his absolute perfection, his unchange-



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able nature, his infinite dominion and sovereignty; and especially the display that he has made of all those glorious excellencies, in the works of Creation and Providence, and, above all, in the Redemption of the world by our Lord JESUS CHRIST: Upon which articles I purpose to insist in another discourse.

Now, &c.

S E R.

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SERMON IV.

THE  
ATTRIBUTES  
AND  
PERFECTIONS  
OF  
G O D,

A reasonable Ground of Obedience  
to HIM.

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SERMON IV.

ATTRIBUTES



PERFECTIONS

GOD

A theological Ground of Obedience  
to Him

## S E R M O N IV.

J O B xxi. 15.

*What is the Almighty, that we should serve him?*

**I**N my former discourse I shewed, *First*, what the service of GOD implied. *Secondly*, I proceeded to draw such arguments and motives from the nature and attributes of GOD, as must be confessed sufficient to solicit our service: as, *1st*, That he is a real Being; *2dly*, That he is eternal; *3dly*, That he is infinite and omnipresent; *4thly*, That he is omniscient; *5thly*, That he is infinitely wise; *6thly*, That he is always able to do whatsoever he pleases.

I now proceed to other attributes, that with equal strength and perspicuity may be insisted upon, as arguments for the same purpose, of engaging our service and obedience to him: as,



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1<sup>st</sup>, That he is infinitely Pure and Holy. There is no kind of irregularity or imperfection in the Divine Nature. GOD is not capable of disorderly passions, or evil dispositions: He is glorious in holiness. This is the very flower and beauty of the Divinity. He loaths the very sight of any wilful folly or wickedness in his creatures, as much as any parent would loath to see his child do a vile or brutish thing before him. Shall we not then serve a GOD so pure and holy, who must needs be a very good master? His orders and commands must be worthy of himself to give, and of us to observe; his work must needs be the very best we can apply ourselves to. We never need fear that he will injoin us any evil or needless thing: this is impossible, by reason of his infinite holiness and purity. We cannot be certain that other masters are always just, and their views and purposes upright and worthy: therefore we may sometimes serve them with doubts and reluctance, and imagine that we see something humour-some or selfish, proud or tyrannical, in them. But the commands of GOD are, like himself, infinitely holy, and pure, and worthy: so  
that

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that we may obey him with the greatest confidence and assurance of doing that which becomes us, and which, upon the whole, will be good for us, and all that are concerned in the fruits and effects, the issues and consequences of them.

*2dly*, then, As to the Justice of God; this is also, like himself, absolutely perfect. If we should admire *that* man's justice, who could not be tempted to hurt any one, or do worse to him than he would be willing to receive from him in the like case; who is inviolably resolved to answer every man's just and reasonable expectations; if we should admire the judge, who hates and abhors bribery and iniquity; who administers justice equally and impartially; who passeth sentence according to the true merits of every cause; if we should reverence the prince, who would not smile upon, or prefer an undeserving person; nor let a man of merit go without his due encouragement and reward; that would not suffer any one in his dominions to oppress another, but took constant care to have justice equally distributed to every one; how then must we admire and reverence the great God, the King

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of kings, the judge of all mankind, who is infinitely above any temptation, or deceit, or falshood, or doing the least wrong to his creatures; who always acts upon the principles of eternal justice, and will render both to men and angels what they may justly expect from him? And such as this is the Almighty: Shall we not therefore serve him? If God will return to every one according to his works, he must needs take a distinct and particular notice of them: Shall we not therefore so much fear his justice, as to serve him, lest he turn his vengeance against us? Shall we not be encouraged to serve him, from the hopes we may entertain of meeting with a reward equal to, nay, far exceeding, the best of our service? The devil asked the question, with an envious and censorious view, to insinuate the self-ends that *Job* had in serving God, when he said, *Doth Job serve God for nought?* But neither he, nor any one, needs fear doing so; for God will certainly, and very bountifully, reward every one that serves him, either in this world, or that to come.

3dly, And as his Justice is infinite, so his Mercy is over all his works. We are always liable to great misery, and frequently in very  
great

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great danger of falling into it; and God expresseth his mercy to us, sometimes by deferring, and sometimes by diverting, or altogether preventing it: and numberless are those evils, which might justly seize us, which God in his infinite mercy prevents.

But when, in his wisdom, he thinks fit to visit us with the severities of his providence, and to throw us into miserable or melancholy circumstances; yet even then he mitigates his severity with his mercy, and alleviates our griefs by the supports he administers; or enables us, with Christian patience, to bear his visitation, till it has done its work, and then he mercifully discharges us from it. Nay, when we have sinned against him, forfeited his favour, and provoked his displeasure, his mercy disposes him to release us from our guilt, and discharge us from the obligation by which we are bound over to punishment and ruin. And this attribute he exercises as long as we have any principles of goodness in us, and are within a possibility of being reformed and saved.

Now such is the Almighty: And shall we not serve him? “ Shall not the wicked man  
“ forfake



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“forsake his ways, and the unrighteous man  
“his thoughts, and turn unto the LORD, who  
“will have mercy, even our God, who will  
“abundantly pardon? whose mercy is upon  
“them that fear him, and keep his covenant,  
“and remember his commandments to do  
“them.” Had any of us been so unhappy, as  
to forfeit our lives to the laws of our coun-  
try, and should our sovereign be graciously  
pleased to reprieve and pardon us, we should  
think ourselves happy to serve him, even in  
banishment: And shall God forgive us so  
many faults, and forfeitures of our very souls,  
and shall we not return him the tribute of  
our best services for it?

4thly, But what words shall we find to  
speak of the infinite Goodness of God,  
which inclined him at first to give being to  
the whole creation, and still disposes him to  
regard the work of his hands, and to com-  
municate happiness to his creatures, as far as  
they are qualified for it? If we admire the  
goodness of such a man, as, without ask-  
ing, does one kindness after another to his  
friend or his neighbour, and never denies a  
good office requested of him, which he can  
do without injury to himself, or a third  
person;

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person; who bountifully contributes to the relief of the poor and distressed; and behaves like a friend or a father to all about him; well may we admire the goodness of the Almighty, who gave us our very life and being, provides all things necessary for our comfort and well-being, both in this world, and to eternity; that goodness, which diffuseth itself through the universe, and even extends to us who are evil, and unthankful; that *gives us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, and fills our hearts with food and gladness*, Acts xiv. 17. that goodness, which pours one benefit after another upon us, and lays every man under greater obligations, than all the world could ever lay upon any man.

This is the Almighty: And shall we not serve him? Shall not his goodness lead us to repentance, for having neglected his service so long; or, rather, for having done numberless things to displease him? Shall we not, for the future, serve him in truth, and with all our heart, when we consider what things he hath done for us?

*5thly*, Every attribute of the Divine nature agrees in this, that it is infinite; and so  
is

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is the Truth of God. If we should admire the truth and integrity of that man, who never said any thing contrary to what he knew or thought to be true; who made good his promises, answered all his engagements, and never deceived those whom he encouraged to rely upon him, or expect any favour from him; well may we then admire the Truth of God, who is infinitely wise, and cannot be deceived; and perfectly good, and will not impose upon his creatures; who never speaks otherwise than he thinks, and never thinks otherwise than things are; who abhors all hypocrisy and falshood; who never promiseth any thing but he intends to perform it, and really does so, either absolutely, or upon the creature's compliance with the terms and conditions of the promise. This is the Almighty: And shall we not serve him? Hath he made so many, so large, so punctual promises, relating both to this life and that to come, to those that serve him: And shall not this invite and encourage us to do it?

6thly, We may lose ourselves in the contemplation of the Divine excellencies and attributes; for God is absolutely Perfect.

Every

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Every perfection possible, and the highest degree of it, is to be ascribed to this great and mighty, this almighty and infinite God. His perfections exceed our most enlarged ideas. If we could reckon up all the glories and excellencies scattered through the whole creation, and abstract them from the least degree of imperfection, and conceive them all to be united in God, yet the Divine excellencies would still exceed all we could imagine. God is great and perfect, beyond compare, beyond comprehension.

7thly, And he is not only thus infinitely perfect, but unchangeably so. He is *the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever*; and consequently he must needs be absolutely happy and blessed. Infinite content and satisfaction, delight and pleasure, must needs result from the secure possession of all that is good and desirable. God perfectly knows in what true happiness consists: he is perfectly able to do whatever conduces to it, and to divert or controul whatever would hinder or impair it.

8thly, Nor can any thing be plainer, after what has been said, than the infinite Dominion and Sovereignty of God. The extent



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tent of his jurisdiction is not to be limited, or measured, by any but himself. Since every thing in nature was produced out of nothing by his infinite power, his own will and perfections must be the only rule, by which he governs and disposes of them.

Do we admire the extent of his empire, who reigned over an hundred and twenty-seven provinces? or that of the great king of *Macedonia*, who added the kingdom of *Persia* to his former dominions? Alas! what is this, when compared with *His* Sovereignty who governs the creation, and that not only for the short period of one man's life, but from the beginning of the world to the end of it, and that without any rival, or any difficulty?

Now, shall men value themselves upon serving some great man, or some mighty monarch, who can give laws to several kingdoms, and upon whose counsels the fate of large empires turns: And shall we not serve GOD, who gives laws to nature, is King of kings, and Lord of lords, and rules the whole creation?

Such glorious Attributes as these, belonging to GOD originally, unchangeably, without  
any

any limitation, or imperfection, must needs exalt the Majesty of God infinitely above all other beings, in either earth or heaven itself. And shall we think it below us, to serve such a great and glorious God as this? No, let us rather think ourselves infinitely honoured by his commands, and happy beyond imagination in his kind acceptance of our service.

And still the more effectually to convince us of the obligations we are under to serve God, and to perform every part of our duty to him; let us take a view of his glorious works, wherein those Perfections have been eminently displayed.

And, 1. How clearly are they manifested in the creation of the world! a work so amazing in its extent, so curious in the variety, so just in the proportions, so beautiful in the order and regularity, so useful and beneficial in the nature, disposition, and influences of its several parts; and, in a word, so exquisitely perfect and harmonious, that all its parts conspire, at the same time, for the preservation of the whole, and of one another!

Should we take a survey of the heavens above us, and consider the greatness and  
number,

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number, the motions and revolutions, the figure and uniformity, the nice proportion of the distances, and the convenient positions of the heavenly bodies, both amongst themselves, and with respect to this earth we live upon; we should fall down, and adore the great Architect and Contriver, for the wonderful power and goodness, knowledge and wisdom, art and skill, expressed therein. Those who have tortured nature, to make her confess her secrets, have made every day fresh discoveries of the great power, and wisdom, and goodness of GOD, both in fire and water, earth and air. But we need not wander to the distant parts of nature, nor ransack the elements, to discover the wisdom, and other perfections, of the Almighty: Even we ourselves, in our souls and bodies, continually carry about with us the plain and evident tokens of them. Such as have applied themselves to the study of medicine, and have nicely examined the several parts of the human body, have discovered so much contrivance and goodness, such Divine wisdom and power, in its structure and preservation, that atheism itself has been shocked at the discovery.

Then,

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Then as to the mind of man, GOD hath not only shewn his wondrous Perfections in making it, but hath communicated his Divine Excellencies to it; by which he has made man an image of himself, and set him at the head of the inferior creation.

2. Should we further take a view of the methods, by which GOD proceeds in the administrations of his Providence, we should perceive the most refined policy of the wisest states in the world is little better than folly, upon the comparison with GOD's wisdom. And the truth and goodness, justice and mercy, of their administrations, is never to be compared with the Divine Providence: His Providence, who has an original, absolute, and everlasting right, to govern and dispose of all his creatures, and a capacity every way equal to such an empire: He who is everywhere present to observe, infallibly wise to contrive, and perfectly able to effect, all things as he pleases, must needs be qualified for all the administrations of that Providence, by which he orders, or permits, and over-rules, every thing in the world; and to which all his reasonable creatures, and all their natural motions, and reasonable actions,



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are so intirely subject, that he makes all they do, and all they suffer, and every thing that happens, conspire at once to advance his own glory, and the felicity of men and angels in general, but theirs more especially who are good and obedient to him.

3. GOD's redemption of mankind opens another rich scene of Divine Perfections, in which the regard he hath expressed for the honour and authority of his law, and the provision he hath made for the salvation of sinners, the methods of sanctification, and the means of bringing us to life eternal, do so manifestly set forth every Attribute of his Divine Nature, that we can never take a more awful and lovely view of the Divinity, than when we consider it in this light.

Upon the whole, though by our most diligent search we can never find out GOD, or discover the Almighty to perfection; yet, by reason and revelation, we are sure of this, that the Almighty is a GOD absolutely perfect, happy and blessed, beyond comprehension. He is infinite in extension and duration; omniscient in his knowlege, unsearchable in his wisdom, boundless in his mercy and goodness, inflexible in his justice,

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infallible in his truth glorious in holiness, of supreme Majesty, absolute Power, and unlimited Sovereignty: He is ever the same unchangeable GOD; his Perfections admit of neither addition nor diminution, neither of decay nor alteration: This is the Almighty; And shall we not serve Him?

Let us therefore make his will and precepts the rule of our lives; and in all our thoughts, words, and actions, endeavour to engage his favour and approbation. Let us pay a just regard to all his commandments, positive or moral, of the first or second table; and sincerely endeavour to be in the sight of God, what we would appear to be in the eyes of men. Let us prefer his honour and glory to every other consideration; and persevere in serving him with vigour and zeal, delight and chearfulness.

Let this be the chief care and business of our lives, and let us work up ourselves to such habits of serving him, that we may perform it with more and more ease, and to greater and still greater perfection, every day of our lives; always reflecting, that whatever motives we can possibly think of, to engage our service to the best of men, and

84 God's *Attributes*, &c. Ser. 4.

the greatest of princes, are infinitely stronger when urged upon us, to solicit our service to the Almighty. Piety and justice, honour and gratitude, credit and interest temporal or eternal, whatever can work upon our ingenuity, or affections, our hopes or our fears, will conspire in persuading us to discharge our duty to our Creator.

Let us therefore seriously lay to heart what we have heard; and stedfastly resolve, that whomever or whatever others chuse to serve, we, for our part, will serve the ALMIGHTY.

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S E R M O N V.

ON THE

IMMORTALITY

OF THE

S O U L.

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# S E R M O N V.

ECCLESIASTES xii. 7.

*Then shall the dust return to the earth  
as it was : and the Spirit shall  
return unto God who gave it.*

**I**N the foregoing part of this chapter, the wise man has, in a very beautiful and elegant manner, recommended to us early religion and piety ; which, as he insinuates, must be peculiarly acceptable to GOD, because we prefer it to all the pleasures and enjoyments of the world, for which we have a quicker taste in the spring and flower of life. But if we devote our youth to the pursuit of sensual pleasures, we cannot with so good a grace offer to GOD the last remains of life, when the world and all its pleasures fail us, and withdraw themselves from us ;

when we find a general decay in all the powers of our nature, which at last will terminate in our dissolution: for the experience and observation of every age, and year, and day, convince us, that at last *the dust shall return to the earth as it was*; and reason and revelation assure us, that *the Spirit shall return to God that gave it*.

Which words present us with two different views of human nature; the one of the body, the other of the soul: as to the former, its original is dust; and to dust it is at last to return: as to the latter, its original was more noble; it descends from, and must at last return to God. So that an occasion might be taken from the former part of them to remind us of our *mortality*: but I have rather chosen to turn my thoughts upon the latter part, which raises our minds to a more noble contemplation, namely, that of our *Immortality*.

In discoursing upon which argument, after I have explained the terms, I will endeavour to prove the thing that is here asserted, and conclude with some practical inferences.

The terms to be explained are the *Spirit*; and the *return of that Spirit to God that gave it*. As

As to the *first* of these, we are hereby to understand the *human soul*; which some have described by its essential properties, calling it a thinking substance, and inferring from its spiritual offices its immateriality, and from thence its immortality; and have reasoned like philosophers, and advanced something which seems to carry with it a good degree of probability: others chuse to call it an *essential principle*, or constituent part of man, without further determining wherein its true and real nature consists. And if the best accounts they give us of its operations leave us ignorant of its essence, it is to be considered, that very great philosophers have concluded our notions of body or *matter* to be equally imperfect. That which we see or feel is only the subject of certain properties or qualities: but as to the *essence* of it, we are as ignorant of that as we are of the *essence* of a Spirit. Nor should we doubt of the existence of such beings as the Soul of man, because it is not visible to us, any more than a person born blind may deny, that there is such a thing as light or colours, because he has no ideas of them; which, so long as he wants his sight, he is  
not



not capable of; neither have we a perfect and clear knowlege of the Soul so long as we live in the body. We are indeed able to discover, that there is something in us that will live when the body dies, and partake of that happiness, or undergo that misery, in the *next*; for which we dispose ourselves in *this* state; and this is sufficient to all the purposes of virtue and piety; although one cannot penetrate its essence, or precisely determine what it is. And here we may rest satisfied, and wait for clearer and more perfect discoveries of these intellectual natures, till we come to that light which mortals cannot approach.

But it is much easier to perceive what is intended by the *Return of the Spirit to God who gave it*; namely, that when the dust returns to the earth, *this*, as the nobler part of us, is exempted from that fate, and continues capable of rational and intellectual sentiments and operations; of discovering much more of the nature and perfections of GOD, the beauties of Divine Providence, the treasures of infinite wisdom and goodness, than the most improved mortals in this state can discover; and also capable of greater  
degrees

degrees of moral virtues, and especially of love to God, and every thing that flows from it, than the best of men can arrive at, by the most abstracted and contemplative methods of living in this state. And on the other hand, if it has been trained up to other habits of vice and immorality, of profaneness and debauchery; it will be liable to that remorse, and those painful and uneasy perceptions, with which the very worst of men, in the present state, cannot possibly be tormented.

Now, in order to prove that the Soul really does survive this state, or that something of us remains that is capable of joy or sorrow, pain or happiness, in a separate state, I will endeavour to shew the *possibility*, the *probability*, and the *certainty* of it.

I. The Possibility of it, and that it is not to be absolutely denied.

II. The Probability of it, and that therefore it may reasonably be expected.

III. The Certainty of it, and that therefore we are firmly to believe it.

I. The subsistence of the Soul in a future state, is a thing in its own nature *possible*. For let its existence be thought never so precarious,

carious, yet so long as it depends upon a Being of absolute perfection, it is no contradiction to say, that the great God, who maintains it a moment, having still the same power, should support it for ever. But indeed if it be allowed, that the Soul once subsists, it must be granted that it will do so for ever, unless infinite power interpose, and discharge it from existence. For as beings are not to be multiplied, neither are they to be destroyed, without necessity; unless we have reason, from the nature of the thing, or declaration from God, to think, that the Soul, or any other being, shall be annihilated, we must not presume to assert it. But from the nature of the thing, no such inference can be drawn; for as infinite power is required to produce something out of nothing, the distance being infinite; so the same power is requisite to resolve something into its first nothing; for here also the distance is equally infinite. 'Tis true, by the laws of nature, body or matter may undergo almost infinite variations from one *form* to another; but even as to this *species* of being, *alteration of form* is far from *annihilation of substance*.

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Some great and pious men indeed have appeared to think, that as GOD maintains and supports our beings, there needs no more to dispatch any single person, or the whole creation, into the state of Non-existence, than for GOD to *withdraw* his sustaining Providence. And it is true, that GOD is the Author of our beings, and the Cause of our happiness or well-being: but that our whole frame, or either part of it, should sink into *nothing*, should he withdraw what they call his sustaining power, to me is not so clear. Indeed we might sink into as wretched a condition as is possible to any being, much worse than a state of *nothing*, did GOD withdraw his goodness, and leave us to ourselves: but this would be far from *annihilation*. A *negation* of the influences of the Divine Nature is not all that is necessary to produce that effect: a *positive* exertion of infinite power is required, to strike the creature back into nothing, as well as it was necessary at first to produce it out of nothing; and therefore, from the nature of the thing, we cannot infer the mortality, or what is equivalent to it, the *annihilation* of the Soul.

Nor



Nor can we prove, from any declarations that are made in the Scriptures, that God will annihilate either the Souls of good or bad men; so far from this, that as we shall find in its proper place, the *Holy Scriptures* suppose and prove the very contrary. And therefore the existence of the Soul in a separate state, is not to be denied as a contradictory thing, whatever any may urge against the probability of it, which is the next thing I proposed to consider.

II. Now it is very *probable* that the Soul will survive this state, forasmuch as it has been a *tenet*, sacred to the best and wisest men in all ages; who, by very good arguments, have been determined to maintain it, and never met with any strong enough to overturn or shake it. Mankind has not been observed to consent in any thing more, than in the hopes, and desires, and belief, of Immortality. The common people, and philosophers of all ages and countries, except *Atheists* and *Epicureans*, have believed it: And how can we account for this *universal consent*, unless we suppose it to be the sense and voice of nature; that is, unless we suppose it to be so agreeable to reason, that all  
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who are reasonable creatures must think it true, so soon as they reflect upon it? Now the principal grounds upon which they founded this doctrine, are taken from the *nature of the Soul itself*, from the *nature of human happiness*, and from the *nature and perfections of God*.

First, *From the nature of the Soul itself*; which, from its several faculties and operations, appears to be spiritual and immaterial; and not to depend upon, but be much superior to, the body; and of a nature essentially different from it: and consequently, being not compounded, it is not liable to dissolution, but capable of, and naturally disposed for, an eternal duration. The Soul is conscious to itself of its own sensations and apprehensions; can remember and reflect upon what is past, if not foresee what is to come: it has liberty to pursue its several ends and designs, by *these*, or the *other* means; and can fix its thoughts upon *this* or the *other* object, and recal them at its pleasure. It can compare one idea with another, and infer one thing from another; it can judge of causes by effects, and of effects by causes; can form notions, and demonstrate properties,

ties, of more perfect figures, and swifter motions, than are to be found, out of its own thoughts, in universal nature: the Soul is quick and active, can fly in a moment beyond the utmost extent of *matter*; has a capacity much superior to sense, and to which we often appeal from the reports and determinations of our senses: it pursues ends that are noble and generous, and all its satisfactions are rational. The designs of the Soul are not confined to time, but extend to eternity: it desires, and hopes, and expects Immortality, and eternal felicity; of which, if it be pious and virtuous, it has very ravishing views, and pleasing anticipations. It has also an arbitrary power over *matter*, and can turn the body it informs, this way, or that, at its pleasure. It can by its calm whispers, if we be patient of them, cool the greatest ferments of passion, and reduce them to the bounds of reason and moderation: its happiness doth not consist in gross and sensual pleasures; they are not proportioned to its nature. All the satisfaction it conceives in the enjoyment of those things that are called the goods of the body or fortune, is owing to their usefulness or subserviency to some-

something that is rational and noble, worth the care and concern of so excellent a creature as GOD has made the Soul of man.

Now all this makes it exceeding probable, that the Soul is of a spiritual nature, quite different from, and superior to matter; which, with all imaginable motions, and configuration of parts, can never become capable of those actions and sentiments; and that it is also immortal in its own nature, and has received in its very creation a subsistence for eternity, if it be the will of GOD to continue its existence so long. And that such is his will, may well be supposed, if we consider,

Secondly, *The nature of human happiness*, together with the Nature and Perfection of GOD himself.

As to the former, we find ourselves in this state capable of two sorts of pleasures, *sensual* and *intellectual*. The former is short and transient, but the latter durable and constant. Knowledge is always pleasing; and to consider that we have done our duty, gives us solid and lasting comfort. The former depends upon things that are very often out of our power, and cannot always be had; the body must be disposed, the appetite



quick, and the object present, before we can taste any sensual pleasures: but the other is not so precarious; ten thousand objects we can turn our thoughts upon, as occasion requires, or inclination leads us; and *this* where-ever we are, or what circumstances soever we are in. We can also at pleasure dwell upon the thoughts of our innocence or justice, our piety or temperance; upon the instances of charity, and the offices of friendship and humanity; by which we have endeared ourselves to the world, or at least recommended ourselves to GOD.

Besides this, the difference betwixt these two sorts of pleasures appears from hence: there are no pains of the body but what an innocent mind can bear with submission to Providence, nay, with satisfaction and comfort, whenever they are inflicted for the sake of GOD, and virtue. But let a man be never so well accommodated with objects to gratify his sensual desires, yet if his mind be stung with a sense of guilt, it quite destroys his relish for that kind of entertainment. We may be guilty of excess in bodily pleasures, and it is our duty prudently to abridge ourselves of them, and sparingly to pursue and enjoy

enjoy them: but we are then most to be commended, when we are vigorous and earnest in the pursuit of the pleasures of the mind. From all which it is plain, that there is an essential difference betwixt the one and the other; and also, that the pleasures of the mind are more perfective of our nature than those of sense; and that the happiness and life of the Soul depends not on the body, and therefore it may exist and be happy without it. Besides all this, we are certain, that the Souls of *all men* improve in knowledge, and that the Souls of *all good men* advance in virtue, the longer they live: and we are equally certain, that the Soul cannot attain to its utmost perfection, either in knowledge or virtue, so long as it is in the body. 'Tis therefore reasonable enough to think, that there is a future state remaining for human Souls to live in, and attain to that perfection of wisdom, and all moral excellencies, of which they are naturally capable; but which (in their present circumstances) they lie under insuperable disadvantages of acquiring.

If then the pleasures of the Soul be more noble, and tend to render man more happy and perfect, than the pleasures of sense; if

the Soul be capable of being more perfectly happy than it can be, whilst it is united with the body in this state; if, as long as it is in the body, it be still advancing in perfection, and grow wiser and better by making a proper use of its advantages, and native powers and faculties; it can never be presumed, that it should be GOD's will to discharge it from *being*, upon its separation from the body. This will appear with still greater evidence, when we consider,

Thirdly, *The arguments drawn from the Nature of GOD*; but these will furnish matter for another discourse.

In the mean time let us make this short and practical application of what we have heard.

Since the Soul is of a nature so truly noble and excellent, we ought always to live as persons sensible of their own dignity; as persons of such noble hopes and expectations *ought* to live; as those worthies, mentioned by the Apostle in the 11th to the *Hebrews*, *did* live, who shewed their faith in this article by their good works. They believed and desired Immortality in another state, and, to secure themselves of it, took care to please GOD in the most difficult instances, without reserve or partiality, with resolution, and joy,

Ser. 5. *of the SOUL.* 101

joy, and perseverance. We may be ashamed ever to pretend we believe our Souls will live for ever, so long as we live as if we expected death should put a period to our existence. 'Tis no wonder if *Epicures* and *Atheists*, that neither believe there is a God, nor expect to subsist in a future state, excite one another to a free indulgence of themselves in sensual gratifications and diversions, with this usual maxim, *Ede, bibe, lude, &c.* But it is strangely absurd for those, who pretend they have the faith and hopes of men and Christians, to live as if they had nothing to do but live *here*, nor any preparation to make for a happy life in a future state.

Now the better to dispose us to act suitably to our natures, let us consider, that God and the angels *above us*, and all the animal and natural world *below us*, do that which is agreeable to their several natures; And will neither the beings above us raise our emulation, nor those below us provoke our shame? Shall all other beings, except the infernal spirits, answer the end of their creation by their actions or services, and shall man alone be like those degenerate spirits?



Shall he who by his nature is allied to GOD, and the pure and spotless angels, by his life resemble the brutes of the earth? Good GOD! that so noble a creature as man should chuse no better originals than that of fallen angels, who act *contrary* to *their* natures, or that of brutes, which are much *below* our natures, to transcribe and imitate. Let us seriously consider, from what we are descended, and for what designed; how we debase ourselves by copying after the brutes; and how we shall for ever ruin ourselves if we imitate the devil. Let us reflect, that we are capable of writing after better copies, and transcribing the moral perfections of the Divine nature; such as holiness and goodness, justice and equity, compassion and mercy, that are the very crown and glory of the Divinity.

Let us therefore so devote ourselves to virtue and piety, and behave ourselves so agreeably to our natures, that GOD at last may make us partakers of those joys, for which he first designed us. Let these thoughts sink deep into our minds, and let us take infinite care now, while we may, of our immortal Souls, that must be happy or miserable

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ferable to eternity, just as we behave ourselves one to another, and to God Almighty, in this world. Let it be our first care, to secure ourselves of the main end; think of that awful time when our Souls shall leave the body, and go into the world of spirits, with nothing but their good or bad principles and tempers, habits and qualities, about them, and put them into as good posture for the solemnities of judgment as we possibly can; and let us do this in the first place: for if we consider our latter end, and provide for it, we are safe, and may be easy and chearful; and should our lives be continued longer than we think of, it will be no disadvantage, since, by how much the better we are prepared for death, by so much the fitter are we to live.

But if we flatter ourselves with the hopes of living long in *this world*, and take little thought about our condition in *another*; if death arrest us in the midst of our worldly hopes and cares, it will be a fatal surprize and disappointment to us.

This is the proper improvement of the doctrine of the text, which, from the nature of human happiness, the infinite per-

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fections of God Almighty, and the express revelations made from heaven in the holy Scriptures, appears with the utmost degree of evidence. If we can draw any certain consequence from the most established principles; if reason or revelation have any weight with us, we must conclude it to be infallibly true, that when *the dust returns to the earth as it was, the Spirit shall return unto God who gave it.*

SERMON

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S E R M O N VI.

ON THE

IMMORTALITY

OF THE

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SERMON VI.

ON THE

IMMORTALITY



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## S E R M O N VI.

ECCLESIASTES xii. 7.

*Then shall the dust return to the earth  
as it was ; and the Spirit shall re-  
turn unto GOD who gave it.*

**I** Have already opened this text, and entered upon the proof of the point here asserted ; which is, that the Soul or Spirit of man is different from his Body ; and when the Body dies, and returns to the dust of which it was formed, the Soul returns unto GOD that gave it ; is to subsist in *another state* ; and shall participate of joy or sorrow, according to the habits which it has contracted in *this*.

The arguments which I have already insisted upon, were taken from the nature of the soul, and from the nature of that happiness of which we find ourselves capable, as  
we

we are reasonable creatures and Christians. Besides which there are other arguments to prove the same point, drawn from the Wisdom, and Goodness, and Justice of God; which, being more adapted to the capacity of common Christians, I now proceed to consider.

And the *first* of this class is taken from God's *infinite Wisdom*; who, having created us with capacities of making greater and still greater advances, both in knowledge and virtue, can never be supposed to intend to strike us out of existence, before we arrive at the perfection, of which he himself has made us capable. How does the divine Wisdom appear in our formation, unless we look upon this state only as an introduction to another; and believe that the several generations of men (that appear upon the stage of the world, act a short part, make their *exit*, and are succeeded by others) are only to receive their existence, and the first favours of their Creator here, and afterwards to be removed into a more happy region, where, under the best advantages, they shall for ever improve in those intellectual and moral qualities, of which he has made them capable,

pable, and by which they will still more resemble the Divinity? Now if they always be capable of improving, and growing liker GOD, and yet GOD be infinitely more perfect; it follows, that they are capable of making an eternal progress in wisdom and goodness, and have therefore received capacities of subsisting to all eternity.

And further, since GOD has created us with capacities of enjoying himself more perfectly than our bodies, and the inferior powers of nature, would have admitted in this state, even tho' we had continued in our allegiance, and maintained our innocence, he must needs have intended their gratification; consequently there must be a future state, in which they are to be gratified.

2dly, We may argue the same from the *Goodness* of GOD; who, since he hath inspired us with a desire of immortality, which grows still stronger in good men, as they grow more perfect in virtue, must needs intend to gratify them. He hath made plentiful provision for the entertainment of our senses and appetites: And shall we imagine that he should implant the desires of immortality,



tality, by which we are distinguished from the beasts that perish, and that he should do this in vain, without any intention to provide for their satisfaction? This is such a supposition as cannot be made, without strongly impeaching his infinite goodness.

3dly, Nor will his *divine Justice* consist with the supposition of the extinction of the Soul, upon the dissolution of the Body: This attribute is exercised in giving us proper laws, and rewarding us according to our observance of them. But if we suppose that the Soul dies with the Body, and that a man is utterly incapable of rewards and punishments after this life, there can be no sufficient sanction for the laws of God.

For how can justice make satisfaction to a man's honesty, for the loss he sustains out of reverence to her sacred precepts, when he might have kept an ample fortune, could he have set aside the consideration of *righteousness and judgment to come*? Would not those that are daily pulling down the inclosures of property, and incroaching upon their neighbours, have the better of the poor unhappy sufferers, were not the Soul to survive the Body, and account for every thing  
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Ser.6. of the SOUL. III

it did in this state? If a man's hopes determine with his departing Soul, there needs no more than the artful practice of secret theft or injustice to raise his fortunes. When he can do a thing securely, take any pleasure in it, or make any interest of it; let him but manage so artfully as not to fall under the cognizance of human laws, and there be no account to be given at a future tribunal; may he not say, and do, and live, just as he pleases?

To say, that virtue is its own reward (*i.e.* that it would be better to be honest than knavish, temperate than debauched, tho' nothing more were expected than the natural consequences of those virtues in this world), would be something, if it were abstracted and separated from all kind of trouble and misery. If we take virtue without any perplexities or hardships, it carries its own recommendation: but take it with all its crosses and difficulties, all the sufferings and severities with which it is often attended; take it with the loads of contempt and reproach that are frequently thrown upon it; and then to say, it is its own reward, is little more than an empty piece of speculation.

For, considering the inclination of human nature to avoid all evil, a state of strict virtue, attended with great sufferings, and void of all hopes, would be looked upon as a real misery; and every one would subscribe to the Apostle's sentiments, If our hopes were confined to this life only, *we should be of all men most miserable.* We that lead lives of mortification; we that, to prepare and dispose our Souls for those felicities we hope for in a future state, deny ourselves many things which others innocently use in this; we that are for our religion so wofully exposed to all the ills of poverty, reproach, and persecution; we that chuse rather to suffer the greatest *natural evil*, than commit the least *moral wickedness*; we that look upon nothing here as worthy of our affections and enjoyments; had we no expectations beyond this present life, were we to be disappointed of what we hope for in another, should certainly be the most unhappy men in the world.

For although, according to the present frame of man, and posture of things, we find great satisfaction in virtue, and equal disturbance from vice; this springs, in a  
great

great measure, from our hopes, or dread, of rewards or punishments in a future state: And without these, to be virtuous or vicious would be all one; provided that men so conducted their vices or follies, as neither to incur the displeasure of their friends or patrons, nor expose themselves to the penalties of any human law, or throw themselves into distempers, and hasten their death. So that, setting aside the consideration of future rewards and punishments, the laws of GOD have no sufficient sanctions. Nor, upon this supposition, can we give any satisfactory account of the seeming inequalities of Providence: for, that vice meets not with punishments answerable to its demerits, in this state, is obvious to every one. Indeed, for us to make such an observation, and to give particular instances, would be censured as judging uncharitably, because we are so liable to prejudice and deception; but *Job* and *David*, *Solomon* and *Malachi*, were not deceived: The first of which says, *Job* xii. 6. *The tabernacles of robbers prosper, and they that provoke GOD are secure; into whose hands GOD bringeth abundantly.* And *David* says, of oppressive wicked persons,

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sons, *Pf. xvii. 10. They are inclosed in their own fat, and with their mouth they speak proudly.* And in *Eccl. iii. 16. Solomon saw under the sun the place of judgment, that wickedness was there; and the place of righteousness, that iniquity was there.* He also beheld the tears of the oppressed, and on the side of their oppressors there was power; but they had no comforter, *iv. 1.* And the last of these says, *Mal. iii. 15. Now we call the proud happy; yea, they that work wickedness are set up; yea, they that tempt GOD are delivered.*

And as it was *then*, there is great reason to believe it is *now*; that very profligate and abandoned sinners proceed in their evil courses for many years in this world, and at last quit the stage with less appearance of remorse and compunction, than we may often perceive in those of a much better character. Now would it not derogate from the justice of GOD, to think that those persons dwindled into nothing at death, and survived not this state to receive punishments adjusted to their crimes, which they have escaped in this world?

Again,

Again, there have ever been persons that have devoted themselves to the practice of virtue, and governed their actions and passions by the sacred rules of religion; that have so regulated their conversation, that they have reflected an honour upon human nature; have reproached and condemned the sloth and vice of the unthinking part of mankind; and yet, for the sake of virtue, have been the scorn of fools, exposed to the most exquisite tortures that the wit and malice of earth or hell could invent; but still have persevered, and thought nothing too dear and good for GOD and their Saviour; have sacrificed first their lusts, then their liberty, and, at last, their lives, to the honour and interest of Christianity; as did the Apostles and primitive Christians.

Now since it is thus, that very often to wicked men it happeneth according to the work of the righteous, and to the just according to the work of the wicked; were we to suppose that all these, both good and bad, should sink into a state of eternal silence and insensibility after death; who could then account for the unequal distributions of rewards and punishments? And

therefore, as sure as GOD is just, the Souls of men shall survive this state, and at last be satisfied that the *Judge of all the earth does right*. Then shall they fairly acquit his providence from all unjust imputations; then shall virtue be crowned with everlasting glory, and vice be cloathed with eternal disgrace. — Thus probable it appears, not only from the nature of the Soul itself, and that happiness of which GOD has made us capable, but also from the nature and perfections of GOD, that as our Souls have, in their original make, received a subsistence for eternity; so it is the will of GOD to continue their existence, either in happiness or misery, as we shall lay the foundation for one or the other in this state. But we may advance yet further, and discover,

3dly, The *certainty* of it from Scripture. And indeed, if this argument be not well-grounded, one of the main pillars of religion drops, and all that is raised upon it must of course fall with it. If the doctrine of our Immortality be over-turned, the design of CHRIST in coming to redeem us, and the whole system of Christianity, is evacuated. For which reason, GOD has been  
pleased

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pleased to assure us of this great truth, by the clear revelations of it in the Bible. But, as a very great Divine has observed, the Scripture speaks more sparingly of such things as are obvious to natural reason; and this being a truth of that kind, all the places from which it may be inferred, seem not to be intended expressly to assert it as a matter of revelation: They seem only to mention it, as that which is sufficiently evident from the light of reason alone. And this is generally made in order to some other purpose, beside the confirmation of the point; as, to excite us to our duty, or to quicken our endeavours after eternal happiness. But since it is thus mentioned; since inspired Authors insist upon it, and argue from it, and it is such a necessary foundation both of the Religion of CHRIST, and of Nature; we may be as certain of it, as of any other article that is ever so expressly revealed. All the texts that relate to the resurrection of the body, and the future judgment, suppose a future state; which is the same as to suppose the existence of the Soul after this life is ended: And these are the great articles of our religion, and the



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whole scheme of Christianity turns upon the truth and reality of them.

All the places that relate to the resurrection, and ascension of our Saviour into heaven; his exaltation there, and his coming from thence to raise the dead, and judge the world; suppose our existence not to determine with this state. How could the thief be with our Lord in *Paradise*, the very day on which he expired on the cross, if his Soul was extinct upon the death of his body? All the places that relate to future rewards and punishments manifestly suppose the truth of this doctrine. The parable of the rich man and *Lazarus* is built upon this hypothesis. How could it be more desirable to *St. Paul* to be dissolved, than to continue here, but that he knew he was to exist and be with CHRIST? Why should he and other Christians be willing, rather to *be absent from the body, and present with the LORD*? or how was this possible, if the Soul be supposed to sink into nothing upon the dissolution of the Body? Is there not a plain distinction made, all the Bible over, between the mortal Body, and immortal Soul? Is it not plainly intimated, that al-  
though

though it be in the power of men *to kill the Body*, yet that they are *not able to kill the Soul*? Have not good men committed their spirits to God, as our Saviour did upon the cross, and St. *Stephen* when he gave up the ghost? What can be the meaning of that text, where the gain of the whole world is not to be thought an equivalent for the loss of one soul, if its *life* and *being* determine with the present state? Is it not very plain and evident from these and innumerable other places, that the doctrine of the Immortality of the Soul, is partly confirmed, and partly supposed, as one of the first principles of all religion, whether natural or revealed? Is not *Life and Immortality* set in so clear a light *by the Gospel*, that we need not have recourse to any other authority for the proof of it? Here it appears with the greatest evidence; and the primitive martyrs were so clear in it, that they triumphed over torments, and faced death itself in the most dreadful forms, not only with an unshaken resolution and courage, but even with a triumphant joy; considering, that in heaven they *had a better and more enduring substance*.

Now the truth of this doctrine being founded upon the principles of reason, and confirmed and established by revelation, let us consider what use we are to make of it.

And, *first*, We very clearly discover from hence, what a value we ought to set upon the human Soul. That which in its nature excels all this material world, as being more nearly allied to the great Creator; That which has the Divine image of reason and virtue impressed upon it; That which has a natural capacity to understand and reason, to chuse and pursue good, and detest and avoid all moral evil; That which is capable of being for ever delighted with the discoveries it will make, and the practice to which it will be devoted, when it once gets out of these mansions of ignorance and distraction, temptation and folly, and enters into the calm and peaceful regions of light and purity; is certainly the most excellent thing in the world: And such as this is every man's Soul within him. By this Immortal Nature should every man therefore value himself, and not by any thing that relates to the body, or this life only.

*2dly,*

2dly, Let us think seriously, how much we are concerned, both to believe and live agreeably to this doctrine of our Immortality. All the proof lies on one side, and all the hazard lies on the other. There is no appearance of argument to persuade us that the Soul is mortal; but these that we have heard may convince us, that it shall subsist to eternity. And as the conviction of this, and a course of actions suitable to it, would involve us in no danger, although things should prove otherwise, which cannot be; yet a course of life, suited to the contrary scheme, is sure to draw after it the most fatal consequences, if this doctrine should, as it certainly will, be found true at last. How unreasonable must it be then to argue against it? and how fatal must it prove to act as those that do not believe it? By *that* we shall degrade ourselves to the rank of brutes; by *this* we shall participate in the fate of *demons*: only there is this difference in their case and ours, that they fell through pride, and we through stupidity: but both by believing and acting a lye; both widely distant from the truth, in their respective extremes: *They*, in raising the works  
of



of his hands to the same dignity with the great Creator; *We*, in depressing his glorious image to a resemblance and affinity with *the beasts that perish*.

3dly, To the end that we may more firmly believe this doctrine, and live more suitably to it, let us always keep up the *distinction* betwixt our Souls and Bodies. The notion of immortality decays in those that are under the power of sensual appetites; but by how much the higher we advance in good sense and true wisdom, by so much clearer shall we be in this great truth. For if through sloth, or sensual indulgences, our minds grow stupid and sottish; if we contract bad habits of vice and folly; by so much duller shall we be in apprehending, and so much slower in believing, that there is Something of us which shall survive the Body, and be for ever capable of pain or pleasure in a future state; not only because by bad and brutish lives our ideas become gross and carnal, but also because it is so manifestly a point of interest to believe or disbelieve, according to our moral state and capacities.

Let us then make way for the thoughts  
of

of our immortal substances, amongst those we spend upon our perishing bodies; remembering always how high our Saviour has put the case, and how plainly he has solved it: *What shall it profit a man, says he, if he gain the whole world, and lose his Soul?* This is improvidence, that will prove the most real madness; so much paid, and so little got, as the world itself must be, upon comparison with it. And yet, as great as this folly is, we may venture to say, no man ever sold his Soul at such a rate, but took up with much less than the whole world; and was at the expence of much care, and fear, and pain, and trouble; exposed himself to the loss of his health, his good name, and what not? at present, and, after all, paid down his Soul; and *that*, perhaps, not in the purchase of the world, but even in throwing the world away. Such is the folly, and so great the stupidity, of thoughtless sinners.

*Finally*, From this doctrine of our Immortality, we may draw arguments of consolation upon the loss of our friends. If it was certain that they were reduced to their original *nothing*, upon their death; if it was uncertain whether they were in a state  
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of activity or insensibility, after they were taken from us; very little could be said to administer any comfort to us. But since it is not only probable from reason, but certain from revelation, that their Souls shall never die; but as they withdraw out of *one* state, they enter upon *another*, in which they not only cease from sin, and are delivered from all the troubles and sorrows of life, but enjoy whatever they were, by their virtue or piety, disposed for, or by the mercy and goodness of G O D made capable of; we have rather cause to rejoice than lament. They are already introduced into a state, where the least degree of happiness exceeds the greatest with which we are here acquainted: They are joining the choirs of righteous and holy spirits, in chaunting the praises of their Creator and Redeemer; and wishing, no doubt, for the happy time, when we shall have finished our course below, and they shall congratulate with us, upon our arrival at the same happy harbour; and instruct us in the parts we must bear in the blessed entertainments of those regions of joy and felicity.

Now to G O D, &c.

S E R.

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S E R M O N VII.

O N

CONSCIENCE.

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SERMON VII.



CONSCIENCE.

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## S E R M O N VII.

A C T S xxiv. 16.

*Herein do I exercise myself, to have  
always a Conscience void of offence  
toward GOD, and toward men.*

**T**H E S E words are part of St. Paul's defence before *Felix*, to whom he had been sent by *Claudius Lysias*, when the design which the *Jews* had formed against him had been notified to him.—It was the fate of the Apostles to meet with great opposition, and very bad usage: They went from one city to another, preaching the Gospel; they travelled over a great part of the habitable world, propagating the religion of JESUS CHRIST, and promoting knowledge and virtue; and for this they were exposed to violent persecutions, which they bore

bore with invincible patience and fortitude, and under which they behaved themselves inoffensively. And of all the Apostles, St. *Paul*, who speaks in the text, had perhaps the greatest share. He was exposed to various dangers, and variety of distress; but still his main care was, to glorify GOD by his good life and doctrine. He took all proper occasions to vindicate himself from false accusations, and malicious aspersions; and of all his defences, that in this *chapter*, and of all the testimonies of himself, that in this *text*, is not the least worthy to be observed and imitated. For whosoever looks abroad into the world, will soon be convinced, that there is no small danger of forgetting GOD, and our duty, in the hurry and distraction of human affairs; and that it is a matter of the greatest importance and necessity, frequently to call home our thoughts, and examine our hearts; and as we value our ease and peace in this world, and eternal happiness in the next, to keep our Consciences clear and unburdened with guilt.

1<sup>st</sup>, Let us therefore reflect a little upon the pleasures of a good Conscience, and the infelicities of an evil one in general.

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We must needs have observed, on many occasions, the great difference betwixt virtue and vice, guilt and innocence, with respect to the peace and ease of mens minds. A good conscience is the blessed attendant upon virtue and piety, and an evil one is like *an evil genius*, haunting, disturbing, and threatening those that have deserted the cause of God and virtue, gone over to the enemy, and attached themselves to the interest of folly and vice. The one is the best friend, and the other the most troublesome companion, that we can have in this world. They that have a good conscience, participate of the very pleasure and joy of saints and angels; their hearts are the habitation and temple of the Holy Ghost, who delights to dwell in them, whose minds are calm, and unburdened with guilt.

Should earth and hell combine against a man, that had peace and ease well settled in his breast, it would not, could not, deprive him of his happiness: a secret joy would diffuse itself through his soul, and give him delicious foretastes of the felicity of heaven. But if men wound or offer violence to their consciences, they raise a storm.



in their own minds, and carry remorse and distraction, fears and hell, along with them in their own breasts; if they commit wicked actions under the veil of darkness, or with so much secrecy, that it were impossible, did they keep their own counsel, that any other mortal should discover them, yet they could not hide them from the observation of their consciences, whose resentments would confound them more than the cognizance and penalties of human laws; so great is the confusion that seizes the trembling soul, when the conscience tells it that G O D is incensed against it. Assurance, and even the hopes of life, are then blasted: as the Apostle observes in the xth chapter to the *Hebrews*, and 26th verse. *If we sin wilfully, after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation.* Let this text be understood of an utter *apostasy* from Christianity, to *Judaism*, or to *Heathenish* and wilful abominations, yet that which is affirmed of it, may less or more be said of all deliberate and presumptuous sins, against mens knowledge and conscience. The consequence of which

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which must be a sad apprehension of the wrath of God, and the just indignation of Heaven. 'Tis true, men may, by a course of wilful and habitual sins, *fear* and stupify their consciences, which, when they are weary of executing their office without success, may retire in silence; and they may then be given up to a *reprobate mind*, to sin awhile longer without controul; but it is very rare for the Conscience to continue quiet and easy all a man's life, and especially at the hour of death, unless his ignorance be gross, and his infidelity or stupidity confirmed. If he has any remains of faith or reason left, it is odds but one thing or other will fall out sooner or later, to rouse him out of his *lethargy*; and then it will revenge itself upon him probably as long as he lives, and if he makes not his peace with Heaven, torment him for ever after he is dead. And great is the horror with which it will fill his mind even whilst he is on this side hell: it will tell him plainly, that as he has sinned wilfully against the clear and express admonitions of a faithful monitor, he deserves no pity, can claim no mercy, nor hope for anything but the wrath of Heaven,

and the pains of hell. Let such a man look within or without him, before or behind him, above or below him, he finds himself surrounded with distress and misery; behind him there is nothing but pain and sorrow; heaven above him frowns upon him, and hell below is opening for him. And whither shall such a poor creature fly to escape this faithful witness, this impartial judge, this terrible executioner, in his own breast? Alas! he can never fly from it, so long as he has any remains of reason, any sense or memory of what is past and gone: and these painful reflections upon sin and guilt are but so many presages of the pangs of hell, where *the worm* of a guilty Conscience will never *die*. But admit that men contract such a habit of stupidity, that they are not troubled to reflect upon their condition as long as they live; yet when the *scene* shifts from this to the future state, the sense of their negligence and wickedness will be quick and piercing; they will be for ever afflicted with a sorrowful review of a stupid, careless, and sinful life. But, to be a little more particular, let us consider the pleasures of a good Conscience, and the miseries of an evil one, as we are

Christians,

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Christians, and frequently engaged in the solemnities of religion; hearing GOD's word, paying him our adorations, or renewing our covenant with him. The man that has a good Conscience hears GOD's word with peace and pleasure; whether the principles of his faith, or the rules of his life, are explained and asserted, he has no infidel objections against the one, nor any bias or prejudice against the other. He believes in GOD, and loves, and fears, and serves him. If the great Creator condescends to give him any intimations of his nature or will, his purposes or providence, he is all attention, nothing can be received with more pleasure and veneration; for he looks upon him as a Being full of light and purity, love and goodness, possessed of every perfection, the most amiable and endearing object that he can turn his thoughts upon, and the more so because he is in perfect friendship with him. When he hears what the Scripture says of JESUS CHRIST, and his kind undertaking to redeem us, this is the foundation of all his hopes, raises his heart to heaven, and unites his soul with his Saviour. He admires and adores the wisdom and mercy,



and all the glorious perfections of God, that are displayed in this overture of Divine love and compassion. When he is told, that the HOLY GHOST is sent into the Church to be CHRIST'S Advocate, he is very willing to hear what he has to say in behalf of his Redeemer, in whose favour he is so happily præpossessed. When he reads that CHRIST has founded a church, ordained ministers to govern it, and to dispense the *sacraments*, that he has instituted as the means and pledges of pardon, grace, and life eternal; he is under no temptation to quarrel with the establishments of heaven, but is infinitely pleased and easy to accept of CHRIST'S favours in his own way, and upon his own terms. It is blessed news to him to hear, that those bodies in which we worship and serve God in this world, sometimes in much weakness and affliction, shall be raised up to life eternal, and that in the same, we shall for ever praise him in the next, without pain or interruption. He who has a clear Conscience, receives the promises of life eternal, that are made to the just and pious, the sincere and good, with delight and transport; since, as his heart does not condemn him, he has confidence

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fidence in GOD, that he shall participate of  
 that glory and immortality that is the hope  
 and expectation of the righteous. It gives  
 him some uneasy and melancholy reflections  
 to hear, that any of the same *species* with  
 himself shall be doomed to a state of end-  
 less misery; but when he reflects, that it is  
 what they choose, and have disposed them-  
 selves for, and that heaven itself would be a  
 place of torment to persons of their tempers  
 and habits, he acquiesces in such a dispen-  
 sation, concluding that such a creature de-  
 serves no pity from man, who has forfeited all  
 the compassion of heaven. But a man with  
 an evil Conscience stands condemned by the  
 whole system of christianity, and every par-  
 ticular doctrine of it. It is sad news to him,  
 that there is a just and omniscient GOD;  
 that CHRIST, who died for the world, shall  
 at last judge it, by those rules, which GOD  
 knows he has long neglected and despised:  
 when he hears that every one must first be  
 sanctified by the Spirit of GOD, before he  
 can be saved by the Son of GOD; and that  
 whoever is not delivered from the *power* of  
 sin in this world, shall never be saved from  
 the *guilt* and *punishment* of it in another;

he hears his own sentence past, for he knows himself to be under the dominion of his appetites, lusts, or passions.

That there is a particular method of salvation established for all Christians to take, that would have the benefits of CHRIST's death and passion applied to them, does but aggravate his grief, and inrage his conscience; for he knows very well he never came into CHRIST's terms, nor lived up to his demands. And hence it is that persons of this character do so oft make *shipwreck of their faith*, disbelieve those doctrines, and renounce that religion which looks with such a terrible aspect upon their state and condition.

A man with a good conscience hears his duty explained and pressed by all proper considerations, and sin exposed, and himself and all men dissuaded from it, as that which will prove their ruin and damnation, and he's pleased and easy; forasmuch as he cannot charge himself with a wilful and continued violation of his plain duty, or commission of known and wilful, repeated and habitual sins. But when he hears his duty asserted, he owns the infinite reason that is

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to be given for holiness, and justice, and temperance, for universal charity and good will. He not only confesses the decency and necessity of worshipping, fearing, and serving the great Creator, thinking of him, and behaving before him, with the greatest reverence, and considering and consulting his glory, as the principal and ultimate end of his life and actions; but he lives accordingly: He hears and confesses his obligations to do to others as, in the like circumstances, he could reasonably expect from them; and, as it is most equitable so to do, he not only expects it from, but also makes it the measure of his practices to all others. As God has provided for his support and comfort, he receives his blessings as the overflowings of his grace and goodness, and is far from turning his plenty into occasions of luxury or wantonness.

But a man of an evil conscience stands *self-condemned*; he hears his own heart tell him, that he is the man who neglects those duties, and has long lived under the guilt of those sins, and must needs be troubled to reflect upon it. Even *Felix* trembled

to



to hear *St. Paul* preach. The poor prisoner discoursed with such power and efficacy, *of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come*, that the governor (being conscious to his injustice and bribery, his luxury and lewdness, his great unfitness to appear at the awful tribunal of the righteous and impartial Judge of all mankind) was full of dread and terror; frightened and confounded with the dismal forebodings and apprehensions of the sad doom that expected him.

So powerful is the word of God both to good men and bad, that it fills the *one* full of hope and joy, and the *other* full of remorse and despair. Let us suppose a man at his prayers: If his heart be *sprinkled from an evil conscience*, he addresses his Maker with a full *assurance of faith*, and humble confidence. But how must a wicked man's conscience fly in his face at his devotions? How can the intemperate, the unjust, the unholy, *pray*, That they may live a godly, righteous, and sober life? How can those, that are governed by their own humours and follies, *pray*, That all their doings may

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be ordered by GOD's governance, to do always that which is righteous in his sight? How can those, that confess they are tied and bound with the chain, of their sins, *pray*, That the pitifulness of GOD's great mercy may loose them, when, by repeated Acts, they are strengthening their evil habits every day?

I need not reflect, upon the great impropriety there would be, should persons of some tempers *pray*, That GOD would deliver them from pride, vainglory, and hypocrisy; from envy, hatred, malice, and all uncharitableness; from fornication, and all other deadly sin; and from all the deceits of the world, the flesh, and the devil; from all sedition, privy conspiracy, and rebellion; from all false doctrine, heresy, and schism: nay, every petition in the Lord's prayer does respectively condemn some evil habit, or wicked way of living, which must render the use of it uneasy to those that are guilty of them. How can a profane swearer say, LORD, *Hallowed be thy Name*? How can one, who is not willing to live as GOD's subject, and to govern his life by his laws,

laws, but is inflaved to the devil, and serves the interest of his black empire, say, LORD, Let *thy kingdom come*? How can an obstinate and disobedient, a murmuring or fretful person say, LORD, Let *thy will be done*? How can a thriftless or idle person, one that is too anxious and solicitous, too nice or covetous, say, *Give us this day our daily bread*? How can a malicious or uncharitable, an implacable and revengeful, person say, *Forgive us our trespasses, &c.*? How can one, who runs headlong into sin, and carries as many with him as he can, lift up his heart and hands to heaven, and say, LORD, *Lead us not into temptation, &c.*? But their own Consciences must inwardly reproach them with the contrariety there is betwixt their lives and tempers, and their prayers and devotions. And this is one reason, amongst others, why persons of profligate lives absent themselves from GOD'S Worship.

Let us suppose him at the *Holy Communion*: A good man indeed goes, because GOD calls, and lovingly invites him to his table: He is one of GOD'S friends, and may  
depend

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depend upon a hearty welcome: It is his honour and delight, to be entertained by the great LORD of the Universe, and to receive the graces and favours that are dispensed in that ordinance, by the hands of his representatives.

But what has he to *do* or *expect* there, who has *not on a wedding garment*? Well may his hand tremble to touch that sacred bread! Well may his heart be affected with sadness and horror to think of his sin and guilt, that even the blood of CHRIST cannot expiate, so long as he loves it, and persists in it. He knows, in his own conscience, he does not sincerely renounce the devil, the world, and the flesh, and must therefore carry all the shame, and fear, and dread, that would fill a traitor, when he sat down at his sovereign's table, and had his wicked dispositions, and disloyal principles, writ upon his forehead.

So that nothing is plainer than the assurance with which a good conscience inspires a man, and the misgivings and upbraidings of an evil conscience, when we apply ourselves to any *acts* or *office* of our religion.



religion. We might carry on our reflections upon the happiness of a good conscience, and the distractions of an evil one, in times either of prosperity or adversity, in the hour of death, and in the day of judgment; but these are articles upon which we may usefully insist at another time.

Now to God, &c.

SERMON

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# SERMON VIII.

ON

# CONSCIENCE.

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SE R M O N  
III. VII.

No. 10



## S E R M O N VIII.

A C T S xxiv. 16.

*Herein do I exercise myself, to have  
always a Conscience void of offence  
toward GOD, and toward men.*

**I**N my last Discourse I considered the happiness of a good Conscience, and the misery of a guilty one, *First*, in general; and, *Secondly*, more particularly, as we are engaged in the offices of religion.

I shall now further prosecute the same design, and shew the happiness or misery of one or the other in the various circumstances of human life, whether more prosperous or afflictive.

Let us consider a person in the most agreeable and prosperous circumstances; let him enjoy a sound and happy constitution; yet if he have a wounded conscience, it is



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worse to be born than the sharpest distempers. For under them he may, in a good measure, reason himself into patience, and can pray with confidence, that God would enable him to bear them with submission; *but a wounded spirit who can bear?* 'Tis foolish to persuade a man to endure the lashes of an angry conscience with constancy and patience. But if he has an easy mind in a healthful body, it improves his felicity, and disposes him to relish all the comforts and pleasures of life.

Let a man have a numerous offspring to perpetuate his name, and keep up his family, this will not ease the anguish of a troubled Conscience; their innocence will only serve to remind him of his guilt, and his Conscience will tell him they will only serve to perpetuate his shame, and to make him more frequently mentioned with contempt and disgrace. But if his heart reproach him not, if he has lived an useful and upright, a good and pious life, he's pleased to hope they will inherit the blessing of the righteous, that all he leaves them will *wear* well, because it is the fruit of his diligence, care, and honesty. He looks upon them as the pledges of a chaste  
and

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and faithful love, trains them up to the fear of God, and, whenever he leaves them, is supported with the cheerful expectation of meeting them at last in endless joy and glory. Let him have the greatest character and reputation for his parts and abilities, his wisdom and learning, his skill and policy, his influence and interest; let his name be the subject of the finest *panegyrics*; alas! what is all this to him, whose heart is stung with secret guilt, whose Conscience loudly rings in his ears his sin and folly? The melancholy reflections upon his guilt and villainy will make him hang down his head like a criminal at the bar, before an awful and impartial Judge. But if he has an honest heart, and an easy Conscience, he blesses God for his good name and reputation, because it enables him to do more good, and to shed a kinder and larger influence on all about him.

Admit that he were possessed of the greatest treasures; let the *Indies* pour in their wealth upon him, and fill all his coffers with their richest tributes; let him *lay up gold as the dust, and the gold of Ophir as the stones of the brooks; let the earth yield him plenty*

*of increase, and fill his large and numerous repositories; let him pull down his barns and build greater; and say to his soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink and be merry;* yet what signifies this to a man that is not friends with GOD, and carries about a bitter enemy in his own bosom? who is every day afraid of that terrifying address to the rich man in the gospel, *Thou fool, this night shall thy soul be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided?* But if wealth be poured upon a good man, he can enjoy it with ease and innocence; he looks upon it as the favour of providence, and blessing of wisdom; he rejoices like a faithful steward in his master's confidence, when he trusts him with the conduct and disposal of his secular concerns. Let us suppose him like *Haman* to be the favourite of some mighty monarch, called to his council, and bearing the greatest share in his favour and government, advancing and degrading whom he pleases; his friends enjoying all the posts of profit and honour, and his enemies thrust down below the meanest office in the kingdom; favours and  
riches,

Ser. 8. *Of CONSCIENCE.* 149

riches, preferments, and titles, dispensed by his direction; yet if this man's Conscience be disobligh'd, it will perpetually read him ungrateful lectures; will tell him how much the LORD of lords despises him; how low he is at last to fall, and how much worse his condition shall be than that of the most despis'd wretch whom he now tramples upon: this is a monitor, that, if he be heard, will tell him a sad story, by painting every thing in its proper colours; it wants no favours, it fears no frowns; it will be as plain and free with *him*, as with the *vilest beggar* that hangs about his gates.

But when a good man is happy in the good graces of his sovereign, like *Joseph* in the land of *Egypt*, when he has honour paid by all *about* him, he has perfect peace and calm *within* him. If he be a companion of princes, this is well; but if he have the attendance of a good Conscience, it is much better. He is dispos'd both to improve and relish the pleasures and advantages of royal favour, to the honour of GOD, and the good of his country: and this gives him a satisfaction, of which a wicked man is not capable. And, finally, to finish his advance-



ment, let us suppose him to sit upon an *imperial* throne, to sway his *sceptre* over the largest kingdom; let him govern all about him by the most arbitrary rules; let sovereign princes court his friendship and alliance; let him give laws to kingdoms; and let peace or war depend upon his resolutions; let fleets and armies wait his orders, and the great affairs of empires turn upon his councils; yet if he have a disturbed breast, if he sees the light of God's countenance darkened with angry clouds, if his heart misgives him, and his Conscience assure him, that his Maker is offended with him; though all the powers on earth should be united in the strictest confederacy, to assert and defend whatever he did by fire and sword, alas! mortal power could not secure him from the assaults of this intestine enemy, or deliver him from the tortures of his violated Conscience. Let but this tell him, he is *weighed in the balance, and found wanting*, it is enough, in the midst of his royalty, to throw him into *Belsazzar's* posture, to change his countenance, disturb his jollity, to loosen the joints of his loins, and to make *his knees smite one against another*. Nay, the

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the history of a much better prince presents us with a sad instance under this observation. After *David* had committed those wilful sins of adultery and murder, against his Conscience, the reflection upon his guilt pursued him like raging furies; his honour and power, the pleasure and glory of his court, gave him no relief; he expressed his anguish by attending to all the variety of human sorrows and misery.

But, on the other hand, when those are placed at the head of kingdoms and empires that are as eminent for their personal virtues, as for their advanced stations; as they are disposed to employ their authority for the interest and happiness of mankind; and the glory of the great KING of kings, so they are capable of enjoying the solid satisfactions that spring from their innocence and uprightness; and their friendship with GOD, their alliance with heaven, and the *plaudits* of their own Consciences, cheer and raise their minds much beyond the successful conclusion and ratification of the most beneficial treaties, and the addresses and acclamations of their subjects in all parts of their dominions. Such as these are the

blessings of a good Conscience, and the torments of an evil one, in the most prosperous turns and conditions of human life.

Let us now carry on our reflections to the times of distress and adversity: and, first, let us suppose a man persecuted for his religion and virtue, chased from his friends and country, exposed to all the penalties that infidels and wicked persons can inflict; let him be deprived of his liberty, and denied the privilege of breathing in the open air, yet a good Christian will bear it all, not only with patience, but satisfaction, and rejoice to be counted worthy to suffer for his Saviour. It was a good cause, and a clear Conscience, that made *St. Paul* and *Silas* sing anthems of praise in chains and prison: it was this that supported *Jeremiah* in the dungeon, *Daniel* in the lion's den, and the *three children* in the fiery furnace.

Suppose a person with a good Conscience under censures or misreports, his words perverted, his actions scanned with spite and envy; nay, suppose him under downright slanders, charged with words and actions he never did or said, things fixed on him which he scorns and abhors to be guilty of; it must  
be

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be confessed these are very unfortunate circumstances; forasmuch as when ill facts are roundly charged upon the best of men, quite contrary to their general character and conduct, it may not be in their power to vindicate themselves by a plain proof of the contrary, or making the falsity of the charge appear, any more than it is to prove a negative: And although the accusation be most false and invidious in itself, yet it may deprive them of the capacity of doing that good which otherwise they might have done: And I know not what circumstances can be more unhappy, or more dispose a serious person to uneasiness and melancholy. But yet, if such a man have the testimony of a good Conscience, that in simplicity and Christian sincerity he has led his life and conversation both towards heaven and earth, though he may be ever and anon troubled and dejected, when he reflects upon the undeserved usage he meets with, and the incapacity that he fears he shall fall under of doing God the service that he is desirous of doing; yet, when he duly considers the matter, he is satisfied to think, if God lay him aside for a while, he will still find proper instruments  
for



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for his own work; He will not disquiet himself in vain, but endeavour to refute the scandal by a strict and good life; which, although it be a slow, is yet a very safe and sure method of vindicating a man's abused innocence. All this he will do, and what else becomes him, and refer the rest to God's good providence, who will, in his own time and method, make his *righteousness shine as clear as the light, and his just dealing as the noon-day*. Thus it was with *Joseph*: He lay under all the disgrace that a charge of the vilest ingratitude, the most shameless impudence, and the lewdest villainy, could load him with; but yet the greatness of his mind, and the clearness of his Conscience, raised him so much above it, that he bore it with a generous disregard, and referred the vindication of his innocence to time and Providence.

Let us suppose him under *the arrest of Justice*, a heavy charge brought against him, his indictment found, and himself arraigned at the bar. Indeed, if he be an obscure person, of a low and private station, he may be put out of countenance when he appears as a criminal before the magistrate, with all  
the

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the formalities of the court about him: But when once he has conquered the surprize, and is entered upon his defence, all that he says is modest and consistent, and his Innocence and good Conscience inspire him with a becoming assurance, and decent confidence: Whereas, if a guilty person be in the same circumstances, unless he be a hardened villain, his Conscience flies in his face, his tongue falters, he can only deny the fact, and put the prosecutor upon the proof. And if he be never so bold and undaunted, there is a mighty difference betwixt the confidence of a guilty person, and the assurance of a clear Conscience: The one is conscious to himself of his own guilt, but acts a part, personates an innocent man as well as he can; but the other stands acquitted from the charge in his own breast, and really is what he appears to be.

Suppose a man to be *in Danger*, obliged to stand in a breach, to secure a pass, or to charge in the front of a battle, where men drop down dead, lie weltering in their blood, and death and destruction fly round about him; yet if he have a good Cause, and a good Conscience, he will keep his post, and  
do

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do his duty; he is neither afraid to fight nor die. But if he distrust his cause, or knows that he has forfeited the Divine protection by his wilful folly and wickedness, his guilty mind *presages dismal things*; no wonder if he shrinks, is desirous to retreat, and trembles like a coward in the fight of death. *The wicked, saith Solomon, fleeth even when no man pursueth; but the righteous is bold as a lion.*

If a man with a good Conscience *is exposed to Loss and Want*, falls on a sudden from a state of plenty to settled poverty, is slighted and neglected by those that his former bounty supplied and relieved; yet this man will enjoy sweeter repast upon bread and water, than the choicest dainties can afford to the rich and criminal. But when guilt and poverty meet, when a man's Conscience within is burdened, and he is unprovided of the necessities or conveniences of life, no wonder that his spirits are damped and depressed, and that his face is clouded and darkened with a settled dullness and melancholy.

If a good man's hopes from his relations are all disappointed, if his children are  
snapt

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snapt off by sudden death, or, what is worse, prove graceless and extravagant; yet he is satisfied to think he has done his part, and neglected nothing incumbent upon him: He has given them good advice, set them a good example, reprov'd or corrected, rewarded or encouraged them, as there was occasion; and left the rest to their own consideration, and the influences of Divine Grace; to which he diligently recommended them in his addresses to heaven: And since this was all he could do, he will not choose to disquiet himself in vain, but, under their miscarriages, enjoys the repose resulting from the consciousness of having done his duty. But when an ill man meets with these misfortunes, he fears his own sins are visited upon, or avenged by, his children: Their perverseness revives the ideas of his own offences; his Conscience tells him they are not more undutiful to him, than he has been to his heavenly Father; and, in his own displeasure against *them*, he plainly reads the indignation of heaven against *himself*.

Let us suppose that a conscientious person falls under the greatest Pains and Disorders; is visited with the common calamity, when plagues



plagues or pestilences waste the public ; or is invaded with sickness, or any other extraordinary visitation ; cries out in the morning, Would God it were evening, and then wishes for the return of the chearful light again ; thinks time runs heavily on, and that nights and days too slowly succeed one another ; he loaths the very supports of nature ; is so full of grief and trouble, that death is more desirable than such a miserable life, and he wishes it would come and put a period to his affliction ; yet his integrity and uprightness will dispose him to bear the chastisement of the LORD with great resignation and satisfaction, knowing that God chastens even those he loves, and scourges every son whom he receiveth, for some wise and good ends that will at last appear. But when a wicked man falls under the rod, and feels the weight of GOD's afflicting hand, the grief of his mind aggravates all the distempers of his body, and gives every malady a sharper sting : He sees wrath and displeasure in the face of an offended Deity ; his sins start up before him ; he frequently reads them in his pains and punishments, and looks upon those sharp and heavy strokes,

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strokes, as the sad presages of what he must for ever endure in another world.

There are other circumstances both of happiness and affliction; but these I have mentioned may serve for a direction to us to carry on the same reflections: for whatever are the supports of a man's integrity, are a great consolation under outward distress; and the reflections upon his guilt indispose him to relish the sweets of worldly prosperity. It is very true indeed, that although such persons as are wilfully careless and wicked, may expect all this trouble and tempest in their Consciences, and are certainly strangers to the pleasures of Religion; yet it may sometimes prove, in fact, that some very badivers are not thus troubled with the sense of their sins, nor is it every sin that wounds the spirit even of those that will sometimes feel the pangs and uneasiness of guilt: There are many of the most profligate, that are strangers to the sorrows that sin occasions. There are many that are carelessly bred, and never taught to distinguish clearly betwixt good and evil, nor to discover and consider the different issues and consequences of them: there are not a few that can satisfy their Consciences

by

by gratifying their humours or interests, or by winking hard, and steeling them against conviction: Some can be easy if their actions are kept secret, and concealed from the inspection of the world; and some also by the numbers that conspire with them in the same sentiments, tempers, and manners: If they have countenance of the multitude, and fall in with some popular prejudice; if they can dress a thing up in agreeable colours, or find out some plausible pretences; if they can raise an interest, or make a party on their own side of the question, they can sing songs of peace and joy for the present: and, if they have the appearance of the approbation of the world, they will feel no great pain from the apprehensions of any future animadversions in another life. Many there are that grow bad, and worse by degrees, and so are better reconciled to their condition, and not so uneasy under it, as those, that after a more strict education, and tolerable care of their lives in the main, take some bold steps in sin, and commit those of the worst reputation and greatest size. Many are so intirely governed by sensible objects, that they have no notion of, or regard for,

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any thing that relates to another world; and many are so drowned in their lusts and pleasures, or captivated and intoxicated with the profits and honours of the world, that the principles and arguments of religion make no impression upon them; And, as St. Paul instructs us, there are some whose *Consciences are seared as it were with a hot iron*, by being bred up to such a contempt of piety and religion, or having so hardened themselves by common practice and custom, that they are *past feeling*. And, on the other hand, it may sometimes happen, that some virtuous characters are deprived of those joys and pleasures, that for the most part are the consequences or attendants of religion and innocence; their tempers are melancholick, their constitutions are unfortunate, and dispose them to fears and jealousies, with regard to the favour of God, and their fitness for entering into life eternal. And thus, as the peace of a good Conscience may be sometimes interrupted, so the pangs of an evil one may be, and that more frequently, diverted, whilst they are in this world: But as the symptoms in the former argue no danger, so the ease of the other proceeds not



from their safety, but their stupidity. And though they both, at present, have a sense of things quite different from what may be expected from the real state they are in; yet, so soon as death appears, and preaches its terrifying doctrine to them, and especially when the future state opens, the sentiments of their minds will change, and bear an exact correspondence with their spiritual condition. And this would lead me to consider the happiness of a good Conscience, and the terrors of an evil one, *at the hour of death, and in the day of judgment*; a subject This sufficient to furnish out a discourse of itself.

Let us therefore defer it; and, by way of reflection upon what we have already heard, assure ourselves, that the best method of consulting our happiness is, to take care of our innocence; and that if we would guard against horror and remorse, we must avoid sin, and resist temptation. We need fear no misery but of our own making, no fires but of our own kindling. This is the true secret of making every condition not only tolerable, but happy. Neither wealth nor honour, power nor prosperity, learning nor  
philosophy

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philosophy, can so raise and fortify the mind of man, as a good Conscience : Nothing *external* can so powerfully defend it, as innocence ; nor any thing so effectually ruin it, as its ill turn and bad habits.

As we would therefore avoid misery, let us shun iniquity ; and as we would have well-grounded peace and tranquillity, let us resolve that we *will not remove our integrity from us ; our righteousness we will hold fast, and will not let it go ; our hearts shall not reproach us as long as we live.*

Now, &c.

philosophy, can to raise and fortify the mind of man, as a good Conscience: Nothing external can so powerfully defend it, as innocence; nor any thing so effectually ruin it, as its ill turn and bad habits.

As we would therefore avoid misery, let us shun iniquity; and as we would have well-grounded peace and tranquillity, let us resolve that we will not remove our integrity from us; our righteousnesses cover us like a shield, and will not let it go; our hearts shall not reproach us as long as we live.

Now, O,

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S E R M O N IX.

O N

CONSCIENCE.

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2 E R M O N IX



BOONSCIENCE

## S E R M O N IX.

PSALM xxxvii. 38.

*Keep innocency, and take heed unto the thing that is right; for that shall bring a man peace at the last.*

RELIGION stands recommended both in Scriptures and experience, as from many other considerations, so more especially from the different consequences of good and bad actions, and the different ends of good and bad men. This is the motive which the Psalmist here uses to engage men in an innocent and virtuous course of living; viz. the issues of it will be happiness and peace: *Keep innocency, &c.* That is, Keep clear of guilt, and govern your lives and actions by the rules of justice and equity, peace and charity, virtue and piety; for this

is the surest and safest way of procuring yourselves the tranquillity and happiness that is most desirable to mortals. It may indeed so fall out, by the iniquity of the times, the changes and chances to which all sublunary things are subject, the passions and imperfections, the various partialities or prejudices, humours or interests of men, that you may for a time be disappointed of your hopes, or exposed to distress, reproach, and contempt; nevertheless, persevere in the ways of innocency and virtue, of religion and piety: and assure yourselves, from the order and nature of things, that are governed by the directions of human wisdom, or Divine Providence, that the fruit of virtue and holiness will, sooner or later, be peace and happiness. And though mens interests for a time may clash and interfere, though their ignorance or passions may at present misconstrue things, though their censures and reproaches fall upon you, and continue some time; yet all these, like the rage of the winds, or the roaring and swelling of the ocean, will cease, and at last be succeeded with calms and composure. Therefore, keep steady and resolved in a virtuous course;

let

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let reason and religion, equity and honesty, be the rule of your conduct: These will bear scanning and reflection, and sooner or later be followed with suitable and correspondent effects. You will, at present, please God; and be inwardly satisfied with your own condition; you will, in time, gain upon the world, and reverence and applause will at last be the rewards of your innocence and virtue. For, whilst vice is triumphant, innocent and righteous persons exposed to contempt and injury, grief and distress, and *that* even for their adherence to that which is just and right, things are in an unnatural state; while violence takes place of justice, and mens unreasonable humours or passions are predominant, and bear down law and reason, the situation of things is so preposterous and contrary to right, that this violence in the *moral*, like that in the *natural* world, will not continue long: Consideration will at last prevail against passion, reason against prejudice, and justice against iniquity. And this is finely set off in the verses before the text. But if that should not be the case, yet, besides their own consciousness of their integrity and uprightness,



which will in the mean while support their spirits, when they come to die, they will have that satisfaction and pleasure to look back upon their past conduct, as will at once justify and reward them for the principles and rules they have followed, and the part they have acted.

I propose now to consider the happiness, and peace, and pleasure, of Virtue and Innocence, and the great misery of reflecting upon Guilt and Folly, when men are brought within the prospect of death, taking their leave of their friends, and bidding the world a lasting farewell. At this disconsolate time, when the concern for those that survive them possesses their thoughts, when the pangs of death discompose their spirits, and almost every thing about them conspires to make their condition as uneasy and melancholy as they can possibly endure; *O well is he, and happy shall he be*, that has a clear Conscience! This will cheer his soul upon the verge of life, and bid it appear with confidence among Saints and Angels. When *Hezekiah* was sick unto death, and the Prophet brought him a message from Heaven, that he must die and not live; under all the distress

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distress and sorrow with which it surprised him, what has he to hold up his heart but a good Conscience? *Remember now, O LORD, says he, I beseech thee, how I have walked before thee in truth, and with a perfect heart, and have done that which was good in thy sight, Isaiah xxxviii. 3.* How cheerfully does St. Paul look death in the face, when he reflects upon his good life, *2 Tim. iv. 6. I am ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand: I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the LORD, the righteous Judge, shall give me in that day.* The comfort of reflecting upon piety, honesty, and innocence, in our last moments, revives the fainting spirits more than all the cordials which the best skill can prepare and administer: It is not to be described or conceived till we come to feel it. But what a dismal scene then opens to a guilty Conscience, when the man is putting off his mortality, quitting the stage, and about to deliver up his accounts to the great LORD of the Universe! His memory will then terrify him with a frightful view  
of

of a wicked life; his impiety and iniquity, his excess and debauchery, his pride and luxury, his wickedness and folly, will present themselves in hideous forms, quite stript of the benefit and pleasure that once recommended them, and attended with nothing but terror, guilt, and pain. He is then in a sad condition indeed, and never like to be in a better, but infinitely worse, if worse can be, to all eternity. *The wicked, says Solomon (Proverbs xiv. 32.), is driven away in his wickedness; but the righteous hath hope in his death.* When the good man looks back upon his life, and finds he has sincerely discharged his duty to God and the World, we may suppose him, with much joy and satisfaction, thus to bespeak his surviving friends: "I am now going to give up  
 " my accounts to the great LORD of the  
 " universe; and, for the honour of reli-  
 " gion, and your encouragement, I solemnly  
 " declare, that I am so far from repenting  
 " of any thing I have done to please God,  
 " that I wish I could have done a thousand  
 " times more to serve him. The reflections  
 " upon my sincerity and diligence, give  
 " me that pleasure and satisfaction, that  
 " I

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"I would not exchange for the greatest ho-  
"nour and sovereignty in the universe,  
"could I live to enjoy it. As it has been  
"my business to worship, and adore, and  
"serve my Maker all my days; so now,  
"over and above the pleasure that I have all  
"along received from the discharge of my  
"duty, I have the hopes of being admitted  
"into some happy post, in which I shall con-  
"tinue my faithful services to him for ever.  
"As I have had the honour of my Saviour,  
"and the peace and interest of his church,  
"at my heart; so I depend upon his inter-  
"cession, and hope, by virtue thereof, to  
"be admitted into that glory and happiness  
"that he has purchased, and is gone to  
"prepare for his true disciples. I never  
"placed my religion in using or decrying  
"any outward *forms*; but my heart, and  
"all my powers, my time, and all my ta-  
"lents, my fortune, and every thing I have  
"received from God, have ever been de-  
"voted to his honour and service: And now  
"I hope to be more perfectly devoted to  
"him, and to have all my powers enlarged,  
"and employed in such offices and services  
"as he shall think fit to honour me with,  
"and



“ and employ me in. I have observed, and  
 “ much lamented, that great disputes were  
 “ raised about the external offices and ad-  
 “ ministrations of religion; but I never heard  
 “ that any questions were made about our  
 “ obligations to *be* and to *do* good, and to  
 “ live like our blessed Redeemer. As in the  
 “ church of CHRIST that is here established  
 “ according to the rules of the Scripture,  
 “ and by all the authority of the nation, I  
 “ could find nothing which I could think in  
 “ my conscience would hinder me from be-  
 “ ing one of the best Christians in the world,  
 “ if I was so disposed to be, but rather, on  
 “ the other hand, met with all necessary and  
 “ desirable helps and means of knowlege  
 “ and grace to enable me so to be; I there-  
 “ fore adhered to it, and endeavoured to  
 “ keep the *unity of spirit, in the bond of*  
 “ *peace, and in righteousness of life.* And  
 “ now I trust I shall be translated from this  
 “ society and company of Christians here on  
 “ earth, to the still more perfect fellowship  
 “ of the Saints in the kingdom of glory.  
 “ As I was a member of this world, I was  
 “ interested in the concerns of it, partly as  
 “ a proprietor, and partly as a steward: But  
 “ I

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“ I have found by experience, that the less  
“ I had to do with it, the less my own peace  
“ and repose were interrupted by it. I had  
“ here certain rights and privileges, with  
“ which the claims and pretensions of others  
“ interfered; these I asserted or waved, as  
“ I thought it most just, reasonable, and ex-  
“ pedient. As my dealing with my neigh-  
“ bour was governed by the rules of peace  
“ and truth, of justice and charity; so I  
“ leave the world in perfect love and friend-  
“ ship. As I have been the severest to, and  
“ have had the greatest jealousy of myself,  
“ and strictly followed the rules of modesty,  
“ sobriety, and temperance, and have treat-  
“ ed my body as the *temple of the Holy*  
“ *Ghost*; so now that it is to lie down in  
“ the dust, I hope it will at the last day be  
“ raised up again, and be for ever employed  
“ in the service and adoration of God and  
“ my Saviour. As the will of God has been  
“ the rule of my life, so I heartily submit  
“ to it in my death: And now that I can  
“ have no other end but your good, and the  
“ glory of my Maker, let me recommend  
“ to you the fear and love of God, charity  
“ and good-will to men, humility and self-  
“ denial,

“denial, the mortification of all brutish  
 “passions, all carnal and worldly affections,  
 “thankfulness and contentment, heavenly-  
 “mindedness; and a just esteem or contempt  
 “of every thing in this life, according as it  
 “may help or hinder you in the pursuit of  
 “a better.”

These, and such-like, are the sentiments  
 of a conscientious man, when he comes  
 within the prospect of death; such his re-  
 flections upon his own conduct, such his  
 dying counsel to his surviving friends.

But when a wicked man looks back upon  
 his defects, and follies, and vices, we may  
 well suppose that his case and circumstances  
 must give him different reflections: His last  
 moments, if he is not stupid and insensible,  
 must be employed in such thoughts as these:  
 “I now feel, that I am a helpless and de-  
 “pendent creature. I am now leaving this  
 “world, and find nothing to succeed in  
 “that place that it has had in my heart  
 “and affections. I begin now to fear and  
 “feel, that there is too much truth and  
 “reality in what I have heard of the Being  
 “of a GOD, of a future state, and of the  
 “immortality of our souls: O! what shall

“I

“ I do, when I appear at that awful tribu-  
 “ nal, where I must give an account of my-  
 “ self? How shall I answer for my forget-  
 “ fulness or contempt of my Creator, my  
 “ neglect of his worship and service? How  
 “ shall I excuse my profanations of his holy  
 “ name and day, my wanton and wicked  
 “ oaths, and curses, and blasphemies? What  
 “ answer shall I make for myself, when  
 “ my injustice and iniquities shall be laid  
 “ to my charge; when it shall appear,  
 “ that I have falsified my trust, and disap-  
 “ pointed the just expectations that were  
 “ formed by my own undertakings and en-  
 “ gagements, which I have neglected? What  
 “ advantages have I taken of men’s igno-  
 “ rance, weakness, or necessities? What  
 “ prejudice have I indulged, what partiality  
 “ have I used, what ill use have I made of  
 “ my power and interest to obstruct justice,  
 “ to favour *one*, or distress *another*, quite  
 “ contrary to honour or honesty? What will  
 “ become of me, when those that I have  
 “ injured shall appear against me; when my  
 “ secret frauds shall be exposed before men  
 “ and angels; when it shall appear, that  
 “ those things that I have bequeathed to my  
 VOL. I. N “ friends



“ friends and children, belonged to the fa-  
 “ therless and widows, or to the poor and  
 “ helpless, that were not able to assert and  
 “ recover their right? O! that I had been  
 “ content with my own! or had time, and  
 “ power, and heart, to make restitution!  
 “ What a part have I acted, what little  
 “ good have I done in the world; how  
 “ much worse have I helped to make  
 “ it! What passions have I indulged, what  
 “ affections have I gratified, what guilt have  
 “ I contracted, what sins have I occasioned!  
 “ O that I could but forget the pride and va-  
 “ nity, the riot and luxury, the lewdness and  
 “ debauchery, the avarice and profaneness,  
 “ the pleasures and amusements, the diver-  
 “ sions and follies, of my past life! But, alas!  
 “ if I should do so, yet all is recorded in  
 “ heaven; or if all my sins were expunged  
 “ out of those registers, yet the habits I  
 “ have contracted, and the guilt with which  
 “ my soul is defiled, would sufficiently di-  
 “ stinguish me in the next world, and le-  
 “ gibly manifest the courses I have taken in  
 “ this. O that I could be discharged from  
 “ existence, that I might be free from that

“ worst

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“ worst of all torments, reflecting upon my  
“ own guilt and folly!”

But if men are neither so perfect, nor so abandoned, as these different reflections suppose, but have a mixture of good and evil; yet, as one or the other has prevailed upon the main, they will be cheared or distressed to look back upon it: And if it be doubtful which has had the ascendant, their fears will rise in proportion to that uncertainty. Even those that are possessed with a tolerable sense of God and Religion, and have never habitually neglected the means of Grace and Salvation, may also have many defects and imperfections to lament; and, when they conceive how much they have conformed to this present world, and what share its follies and diversions, its pleasures and vanities, have had in their hearts; what time they have spent in fruitless studies and inquiries; in what sensual indulgencies and gratifications they have allowed themselves; they will be much afraid, lest their want of any intention to correct the turn of their minds, and abridge themselves of their improper liberties, and bring their lives to a more strict conformity to the rules of the

Gospel, and the practice of the best of Christians, should be put in as a bar against their passing for frailties and infirmities. When those that in the main have lived soberly, righteously, and godly, call to mind their negligences and ignorances; when they reflect upon the passion they have had for the pomps and vanities, the gaieties and distinctions of human life; their uneasiness with their lot; their unthankfulness to God; their want of zeal for his honour and glory; their indolence and want of resolution, when proper occasions called upon them to declare for God and Religion; their neglect of many opportunities that Providence gave them for reading the Scriptures, attending publick prayers, and partaking of the holy *Communion*; and not only their own neglect, but their talking with too much contempt of fasting or abstinence, and proper austerities, that they know would have been of very great service to check, if not their own, yet other peoples irregular inclinations, to cure their innordinate passions, to improve their purity and virtue, and to fortify them against temptation (for there are some wicked spirits, that *go not out but by prayer and fasting*);  
when

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when they reflect upon their immoderate care to provide for their childrens living in ease and splendor in this world, and of their neglect of their Christian education, and preparing them for a much better inheritance in the next; when they call to mind their zeal and eagerness in party disputes and religious controversies, and their too little regard for those habits, and tempers, and good actions, wherein the very essence and substance of religion consist; when they reflect upon their thirst for glory, and love of the praise and applause of men, their ambition to excel in the pomp and pride of life; when they call to mind the weakness and inconstancy of their purposes and better resolutions, the defects of their best services, the absence and dissipation of their thoughts at their prayers and devotions, the keenness of their passions and great indiscretions, the motions of envy, and the vanity of their thoughts too frequently roving about in endless mazes, and forming imaginary schemes of future happiness; they will find it very hard to forgive themselves, or to support their minds under the just reproaches of their own Consciences. But if very bad men have found out the se-



cret of hardening their hearts to that degree, that death itself cannot much affect them, nor be able to overbear their infidelity and stupidity, and excite any troublesome reflections upon their past lives, or fright them with a prospect of their future state; yet, so soon as the scene shifts from this world to the other, when their bodily eyes are closed, those of their minds shall be opened, and all their dormant powers awaked; then shall they feel, to some purpose, the sense of those things that could not here make any impression upon them. And so, if some good Christians, by reason of the natural tenderness of their hearts and consciences, their strong ideas of the malignity of sin, and severity of Divine justice, and the melancholy turn of their minds, are all their lives long, as the Scriptures express it, *the children of God walking in darkness*, distressed with fears, and incapable of any consolations that spiritual persons endeavour to administer; yet in the future state they shall be admitted to those joys that were not thought fit for them in this. Both one and the other of these shall, upon their death, be placed in such a state, as the mercy or  
justice

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justice of their Judge shall assign them; in the happiness or miseries of which their bodies shall not participate till the general resurrection; but then their bodies and souls shall be re-united, and both rewarded or tormented in that world, in proportion to their care or negligence in this. This is a very practical and affecting article, and worthy to be referred to their serious meditation; but too much to be opened and pressed at this time as it deserves. Let it therefore suffice to have shewn the pleasures of a good Conscience, and the distractions that are the fruits of guilt and folly, whether we suppose a person at his devotion, hearing God's word, or renewing his covenant with him in the holy *communion*, which was the subject of *one* discourse; or we suppose him in a state of either prosperity or adversity, which was the subject of *another*; or we suppose him to stand within the prospect of death, or making his approach to the judgment-seat of CHRIST; all which are very forcible considerations to prevail on us to *keep innocence, and take heed unto the thing that is right, since that shall bring a man peace at the last*: for this is the way to all the happiness of which we

are capable, so long as we live; and it is sure to *bring a man peace at the last.*

Let us, therefore, suppose a person making his approach to the judgment-seat of CHRIST: what a joyful thing it will be for the righteous to rise out of their graves, at the voice of the Archangel, and appear before their Saviour upon his tribunal, full of peace and assurance, knowing that their Judge is their friend, that they shall have a fair and favourable trial, come off with applause, and be received into the society of Saints and Angels with hallelujahs and acclamations! But O the sad sight, when the wicked are raised out of their graves, and their guilty souls again inspire their polluted bodies; when they make their trembling approach to the tribunal of that dread GOD, whose authority they have despised, whose laws they have trampled under their feet, whose ministers and message they have treated with contempt and scorn! If their Consciences have been ever so stupid and insensible all their lives long, if death itself could not startle them; yet the sight of their Judge will most certainly rouse them, and awake every

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every principle of reason, to their infinite amazement and confusion.

Finally, Let us suppose them consigned, by the righteous sentence of GOD, to that state for which they have been preparing themselves all their life long: the one will for ever feast upon the sweets of innocence and virtue, and the other will be for ever distracted with the stinging reflections upon his vice and villainy: the one will be supported with the comforts of Heaven, that will eternally cheer his heart; and the other will be stung with endless remorse, and tormented with a *worm* that will for ever prey upon his vitals, and be immortal as his soul. Such is the difference of guilt and innocence, at the hour of death, and in the day of judgment.

We may therefore assuredly collect, that as *peace at last* is most desireable, so there is no way to it but by innocence and virtue; to which if we take not heed, we can promise ourselves nothing but distraction and horror; the genuine issue of a wicked and careless life. We may also discover from hence the great wisdom of religion, that takes care of the main chance, and provides



vides a *fund* of repose and tranquillity of heart, when we shall have most occasion for it. That we ought to form our notions of things as they will appear to us at death, or judgment, when all things shall be stript of their *masks* and disguises; and not from the *appearance* they make when they are seen through the false *mediums* of pride and ease, secular interest, or sensual pleasure. Now if these be just reflections upon the pleasures or miseries of a good Conscience, or an evil one, in this world and the future, what remains but that we resolve rightly to inform our Consciences, that they may be safe directors; and then to follow their advice, that they may be easy companions? And this is a point of the greatest importance to our peace and security; for if the Conscience be mistaken, distress or danger will be the consequence, whether we slight it, or revere it. The will of GOD, however manifested, is our principal rule, and the Conscience is but a subordinate guide. We may precipitate ourselves into dangerous errors, or vices, if we take any thing but the Law of GOD for our binding rule, or if we think that any thing will bear us out, if we  
have

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have not that on our side: a good intention, or the best mens advice or example, oaths or vows, civil or ecclesiastical laws, the fear of scandal, or any thing else that induces us to neglect what the Law of GOD enjoins, or to do what it forbids, will not justify us, when we come to be judged by that Law, which is the principal rule of our lives and actions. It must be confessed, that these are all worthy of our great regard; and common sense, as well as christian prudence and piety, requires us, not to despise or neglect them: but our principal regard is due to the Law of our Maker, from which they respectively derive their authority; this is the adequate rule of Conscience and practice, by this we are to be guided here, by this to be judged hereafter. When therefore the Conscience has consulted, and is thoroughly satisfied about the Law and Will of GOD, it is GOD's *Vicegerent* in the breast of man, and stamps its orders or admonitions with the authority of Heaven; it will not neglect to declare it effectually and impartially, nor will it connive at, or excuse, the least wilful deviation from it. A well informed Conscience is still true to the cause of GOD, and

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and cannot be corrupted or bribed to hold its peace, or to speak otherwise than GOD himself would do, did they inquire of him. Whoever he is that violates his Conscience, is certain to hear from it; his wealth or power, his interest or dignity, his wit or artifice, cannot engage it to absolve or excuse him; nor, on the contrary, can it be brought to check or reproach an innocent person, let him be ever so poor, or ever so unfortunate. All men are equally related to Heaven, equally obliged to obey their Maker; and this monitor is equally free with one and another. It sits as an *Empress* upon the throne of the heart, and acquits or condemns with the most rigorous impartiality, truth and justice; nor can any mortal power revoke its sentence. Whoever therefore resists his Conscience, rebels against Him whose authority it bears, lifts up his hand against GOD, and proclaims war with Heaven; a thing so horribly daring and insolent, that if we would give ourselves leave to reflect upon it, in a serious and recollected temper, for our own peace and ease, when we come to this or any other sacred place of Divine worship, for our safety  
and

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and happiness in every state and condition of life, for the support and satisfaction of our minds at the hour of death, that we may be able to give a good account of our selves in the solemnities of judgment, and that we may lay a foundation of everlasting joy and comfort, we must resolve to reverse our Consciences, to omit nothing that they, from either Scripture or Reason, declare to be necessary, to do nothing that from the same authority, they pronounce to be sinful, to avoid the very *appearance of evil*, and beware of every temptation, lest we be surprised into ruin and perdition. And then as we may join with faith and comfort in the offices of religion, so we may hope, that God will bless us, and that his blessings will come without any mixture of judgments; that we may enjoy the outward favours of Providence, and feel no inward pangs or reproaches; that we may, in this world, taste and enjoy the blessed anticipations of the happiness of heaven; or, if it shall please our Heavenly Father to visit us with any kind of adversity, our crosses and troubles may not be pointed with double stings, overcharged with weight and poison, and prove  
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the beginnings of everlasting sorrows; but that, being purged thereby in this world from our moral impurities, our hearts may be supported under them; and that we may at last emerge out of them either into more desirable circumstances in this world, or into the eternal joys and pleasures of the world to come.

Now, &c.

SER-

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S E R M O N X.

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## S E R M O N X.

P S A L M xix. 12.

*Who can understand his errors?  
Cleanse thou me from secret faults.*

**T**HIS *Psalms* shews us the advantages of contemplating the works of creation, from the first to the seventh verse; and the benefits also of meditating upon the word of God, and considering the beauty and reason of the divine precepts, from the 7th to the 12th. At the 12th verse he begins to reflect upon his own conduct, and compare it with this pure and perfect law; and is forced to acknowledge his guilt; and that not only which he had contracted by wilful and presumptuous sins, but by those also that were committed with less attention and reflection, out of Ignorance or Inconsideration.

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O

And



And this he takes to be a common case, in the words of the text, *Who can tell how oft he offendeth? cleanse thou me from my secret faults.*

So that the sins of weakness or infirmity, or those of wilfulness and presumption, are not the only offences that call for our acknowledgement and repentance, but also those of Ignorance or Inadvertency, although they are usually reckoned to be rather defects than transgressions. As to which I purpose to inquire,

I. What they are.

II. How far Ignorance, or want of attention and consideration, may be thought to affect mens actions.

As to the *former inquiry*, it is to be considered, that mens Ignorance may respect either the *rule* of their actions, or the *actions themselves*. 1. Men may be ignorant of the law, and the authority, by which it is imposed; or if they have some notion of this, they may not understand its full extent. It may not be sufficiently clear and express in some cases, but may want to be compared with other laws or rules; and inferences are

to

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to be made, and conclusions drawn, before they can apply it to many particular cases.

*2dly*, They may also be ignorant, that the facts of which they are conscious, are the transgressions of any law, or that in their consequences they may involve them in guilt. As to the occasions of ignorance, it may be owing, in some measure, to want of capacity, means, or opportunity; and may be attributed in others to inadvertency, negligence, or prejudice, where neither capacity nor opportunity are wanting. There is nothing more notorious than the little share of sense with which great numbers are endowed; they are capable of little more than being ruled and governed by the sense of fear, or the little allurements of a brutal appetite; they cannot judge of the reasons of things, nor are capable of that abstraction and reflection, that is necessary to form the judgment, from the consideration of the nature and relation of things and persons: others are placed in such circumstances of life, that they have no opportunity of inquiry or information. Many are sluggish and heavy, and want spirits, or are so immersed in worldly cares

and business, that they have no taste for other things; and the major part of men want learning, and are obliged to depend upon the information and integrity of those that have it. Great multitudes are prejudiced by a wrong education, or by the observation of the fashions, and customs, and vanities of the world, which give the mind and judgment a wrong turn: so that most mens sins are more or less to be ascribed to Ignorance or Inconsideration. All defects in practice proceed from, and therefore argue, some defect in knowlege or attention: every man that wills amiss, does also think amiss. For could a man sin with all the consideration, and all the sense of things, that is necessary to keep him innocent, it would be impossible for him to repent; as it must be the recovery of that sense and knowlege that he wanted, which must put him upon repentance. We must therefore conclude, that every sinner that falls, or misses his way, walks in the dark; and that habitual knowlege, or at least actual reflection, is wanting. Now those things that are done, while we are ignorant of any law that forbids them; or which we do not, while

while we are ignorant of any law that requires them; or which we do or forbear, without having any reason to suspect, that they are commanded or forbidden by such laws as we do understand; are sins of Ignorance; and attended with more or less guilt, according as they are circumstanced.

II. The degrees of which are the next point we are to consider, or, how far Ignorance affects the actions of men.

In the resolution of which inquiry we are to observe, That, to render any thing sinful in the sight of G O D, it must be, in some sense, chosen and voluntary. And every thing is more or less displeasing to G O D, by how much it is more or less wilful.

From whence it will follow, that Ignorance,

1. Sometimes intirely excuses from guilt; as, where it is invincible; because then it is involuntary. On which account idiots, and persons under the disorders of a *delirium*, or distraction, and children before they become to the use of their reason, so far as to choose and refuse good and evil, in a moral sense, are not charged with guilt, tho' they both say and do things that are ma-



terially evil, and which would be censured as transgressions of the law in persons that had the use of their reason, understood the language in which it was published, and the authority by which it was enacted. Besides this, in all cases of ignorance of the fact; a person, as to those facts, is excusable, though, as to the material part of them, they are transgressions of the plainest laws of GOD or Nature: and such was the Ignorance of *Abimelech*: he did not know he had taken another man's wife from him, nay, rather, if either *Abraham* or *Sarah* was to be credited, he had reason enough to believe, that she was not his wife: and therefore his Ignorance of the fact did so far bear him harmless, that GOD himself allowed, that he had done it *in the integrity of his heart*, Gen. xx. 5.

2. Sometimes Ignorance does not altogether excuse, but only in some measure extenuate, a fault. Where men are only *comparatively* ignorant, they are not *absolutely* innocent. In respect of those that know a great deal more, they are said to be ignorant; and therefore are their actions, in comparison of the faults of such, called  
either

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either innocent or excusable, though they are not altogether so.

This is the case of *Heathens*, in comparison of *Christians*; and of those that are bred in Ignorance, or trained up in foily and wickedness, in respect of those that have had a better and more strict education. These know a great deal more, than the other, of the nature and malignity of sin, more also of the obligations they are under to avoid it, and to lead sober, righteous, and godly lives. They know more of the punishments and rewards of a future state, and of the assistance that GOD is ready to afford every one that would use it. And therefore, though both one and the other do the same *things*, they are not, in measure and degree, the same *sins*. They are much more aggravated in one than the other, and though both perish at last, yet the damnation of one will, like that of *Sodom* and *Gomorrah*, be far more tolerable than that of the other.

3. Sometimes Ignorance neither excuses nor extenuates, but rather enhances and aggravates, mens guilt. And this it does when it is chosen and affected by such persons as *love darkness rather than light*, to which

they shun all approaches, lest their evil deeds should be exposed and reprov'd. There are some that have no disposition to do their LORD's will, and therefore inquire not after it, or suffer not themselves to be informed about it; that say to GOD, *Depart from us; for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways*, Job xxi. 14. And to pretend that such Ignorance extenuates sin, is to say, It is in the power of a wicked man to make the same material action a greater or a smaller sin at his pleasure. But when this matter is attentively considered, such a one seems rather to enhance his guilt by his wilful Ignorance; forasmuch as he chuses both the transgression of the law, and the Ignorance of it; which he cannot do, without a profane contempt of the Wisdom and Goodness of GOD, that are discovered in it, and of the Divine authority by which it is enacted. Such a man's wicked disposition is sufficiently evident, by his choosing to follow the devices and desires of his own heart, when he knows he ought to follow better rules, but keeps wilfully ignorant of them; and, by such a wilful neglect of the means and opportunities of information, throws

throws an unworthy contempt upon the benefits of Redemption.

The means of knowlege, as well as those of pardon and regeneration, were the purchase of CHRIST's death, and established by him, pursuant to the power with which he was invested, as the Redeemer of the world. And therefore in slighting and despising these, they slight and despise their salvation, and that precious blood that was shed for it. So that some sins of wilfulness are not so great and heinous as some Sins of Ignorance. To be ignorant of the fundamental articles of our *Christian Faith* is, upon the comparison, much worse than some acts of *Intemperance*, or some neglects of our *religious duties*; because, where these are not habitual, there may be much more said to excuse them, than can possibly be said for the gross Ignorance of any of the main articles of *Christianity*, in a *Christian country*: so great is the negligence, so much the contempt, to which such an Ignorance is to be imputed.

Upon the whole, it is hard to determine the degree of mens Ignorance, the causes into which it is to be resolved, in what measure



measure it is, or is not, affected and chosen; and consequently it is hard to say, how far it excuses or extenuates, or how far it aggravates the faults into which it betrays men.

We cannot be innocently ignorant of the principles of *natural Religion*; the *Being of a God*, the *Immortality of the Soul*, the *Certainty of a future State*; that *God is to be worshipped* and obeyed; that we should do to others, as we should expect from them in the like case.

We cannot be ignorant of the main articles of the Christian Religion, such as are contained in the *Apostles Creed*, without being guilty of great negligence.

We cannot be ignorant of the great Lines of Duty, and the difference betwixt moral Good and Evil in general, nor of the Duties that appertain to the relations and circumstances we are under, unless we are sunk into brutality, and no longer make any pretensions to reason.

But then as to particular questions, relating to the unsearchable nature of *God*, or of human souls; the intricate nature of some actions, under some particular circumstances;

cumstances; as to such articles as are disputable, or as to the modus's of those points, about which we are well satisfied in general from the Scripture; as to these we may be ignorant or mistaken, and yet, we hope, without guilt or danger.

And so, though, as to the general Laws and Rules of Duty, we cannot be innocently ignorant; yet we may as to many particular laws: for instance, all men know that disobedience to the lawful commands of our governors is a sin; but every man does not know every particular instance of practice, whether civil or religious, to which their authority extends. It is easy to perceive, that the excess of rage, or of any other passion or appetite, is sinful; but difficult to know how far they may be innocently indulged, and when they pass the line that parts that which is lawful, from that which is sinful. Many things in the general are very clear; but it may be very nice and difficult to adjust the matter, when the frequency of the acts, or the measure, or manner and way of doing them, comes into question; as how oft we should fast, or pray,  
or

or receive the holy Sacrament ; how much of our income or goods we should give to the poor, or in what way and manner it is most proper and useful to do works of charity. We are, upon pain of sin, to understand all that is necessary ; and our inquiries after them should have no limit or abatement.

But the case is different as to things that are no more than ornamental or perfective : for were we under the same obligations as to such matters as these, we should live under a perpetual rack and distraction.

In these matters a *moral diligence* is sufficient ; *i. e.*

1. Such a diligence as is consistent with our necessary affairs.

2. Such as we use about things of value and importance.

3. Such as wise and good men use, and our spiritual guides recommend and approve.

4. Such a diligence as flows from a real desire of approving ourselves to GOD, and of becoming more and more serviceable to the world.

The

The Ignorance that consists with such a diligence as this, is very excusable; and we need not fear, that our salvation will be affected by it.

By what has been said we may judge, upon the main, how ignorance affects our actions; though it may be somewhat difficult, precisely to determine upon the measures of guilt, sometimes contracted by those actions or omissions that are to be imputed to it.

Upon which consideration we should do as *David* did, pray, that GOD would cleanse us from them: for which reason our Church directs us in our Liturgy to pray, "that GOD  
" would forgive us all our sins, negligences,  
" and ignorances."

It appears by these sins, that we fall short of that perfection both of care, and wisdom, and virtue, that GOD intended we should arrive at.

So long as we act irregularly, though it be ignorantly, we do not attend to, nor make the best use of, such principles as are in all reasonable creatures; or else both our knowlege and practice would be more  
perfect:



perfect: and therefore they are not only arguments of our imperfection, but instances of degeneracy.

Under the Law, sins of ignorance had sacrifices appointed for them, in order to their expiation; and this supposed some measure of guilt: and indeed great are the aggravations of which they are capable; numberless are the superstitions into which Ignorance betrays men; it subjects them to various follies that usurp upon true religion, and enervate its force upon the minds of men. Nay, and what is still worse, when wilful and chosen, it is sometimes the occasion of such sins as are of the most flagrant and presumptuous nature; witness the sin of those that crucified our *Saviour*, and for whom he prayed, That GOD would forgive them, because they knew not what they did. So blinded were they with passion and prejudice, that they did not perceive the dignity of the Person they were treating so cruelly: *For, had they known him, they would not have crucified the LORD of glory*, 1 Cor. ii. 8.

And

And yet such was the doctrine, so great were the miracles, of our *Saviour*, that if they would but have patiently heard him, and seriously reflected upon the power and authority with which he was invested, they must have drawn the same consequences that others did; had they been qualified with the same unprejudiced disposition, and given the same degree of attention.

But, as the case stood, there was a great mixture of Ignorance in it; and such was the goodness and charity of our Saviour, that he improves it as an occasion of recommending them to his Father's mercy, lest by a fatal and sudden destruction, or a judicial and final blindness and obstinacy, they should be precluded from repentance.

And yet there is not a Christian who does not condemn this sin of crucifying the Son of God, as one of the greatest recorded in history, notwithstanding that Ignorance was one of the chief ingredients in the cause, to which it was to be ascribed.

And therefore we ought never to presume so much upon our integrity and innocence, as to neglect praying for the pardon of our sins of Ignorance.

For

For such is our case, that we are not only ignorant, but prejudiced and overborn with vicious habits; we are inadvertent and forgetful; our hearts are treacherous and deceitful; and we are not perhaps sufficiently aware of the mixture of causes, and the concurrence of circumstances, that aggravate our sins; and therefore we ought to solicit God for his mercy and pardon.

Since these sins of Ignorance are such, as in their own nature are supposed not to fall under our notice and advertence when they were committed; and since, by reason of our treacherous memories, we have let slip many of our sins, that were attended with much guilt and malignity, and we are chargeable with more instances and greater degrees, of guilt, than we can particularly reflect upon, or take an exact review of; we are not to be supposed under the same obligations to confess them so expressly and distinctly, as we ought to confess sins against our knowlege, of a more wilful and presumptuous nature; but such a general confession as that which is daily made, in our Morning and Evening Service, is thought sufficient;

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sufficient; and no more can be necessary, because no more than a general reflection upon them is possible.

And thus *David* does: he pretends not to reckon up his Ignorances and errors, or secret sins of sudden surreption, and daily incurfion; but thus expreffes himself, *Pfalm* xix. 12. *Who can understand his errors? Cleanse thou me from secret faults.*



Get rid of Ignorance

Insufficient; and no more can be necessary,  
because no more than a general reflection  
upon them is possible.

~~And that I would do, the presents are~~

to reckon up his ignorances and errors, or  
to set him of his own opinion, and daily  
incursions, but this is not a thing to be  
done. Change then my first paper.

CONCERNING

STAIN

CONFIRMITY

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And that I would do, the presents are

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S E R M O N X I.

CONCERNING

S I N S

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SERMON XI.

CONCERNING



FIRMITY.

## S E R M O N XI.

MATTHEW XXVI. 41.

*The Spirit indeed is willing; but the  
Flesh is weak.*

**I**N the beginning of this chapter, *our Saviour* had been communicating a piece of very melancholy news to his *Disciples*, which was, That one of themselves should, within a very little time, betray him.

Upon which they were much troubled, and either so fearful of being deserted by the good *Spirit of God*, and then falling into such a horrid impiety, or so desirous that our *LORD* should clear *them*, who were not conscious to themselves of any such intention, that *they began every one of them to say unto him, Lord, is it I?*

And when he had pointed out the traitor, and so given warning to *him*, and ease



to *the rest*, yet that they might not presume too much upon their own sincerity, he told them, That every one of them, that very night, should make a sad experiment of their weakness, in being offended because of him. And although they every one appeared to be well resolved, rather to die with him than deny him, yet he knew their strength and weakness a great deal better than they themselves. He knew what a trial they were to meet with, what fears and passions would surprise and surround them, overpower their affection to him, and be too strong for their reason and resolution. And therefore he is so kind as to give them warning of their danger, and direct them to the best method they could take to keep their ground, and to come off conquerors, in *that time of temptation*. *Watch and pray*, says he, *that ye enter not into temptation; the Spirit indeed is willing, but the Flesh is weak*.

From which words, we may take occasion to turn our thoughts, upon the *second* of those *Classes*, into which our *Divines* have distinguished the sins of men, namely those of *weakness* and *frailty*.

In discoursing upon which, I will endeavour to shew,

I. What are *Sins of Weakness*.

II. What the springs, or causes from which they flow.

III. I shall inquire into the guilt that is contracted by them; and, in the last place,

IV. Consider what use or improvement may be made of what shall be said under each of these particulars.

*First*, then, I am to inquire, what the *Sins of Weakness* are.

In the resolution of which there is great consent amongst *Divines* of all parties; who make them to be consistent with sincerity and integrity of heart, by which every faithful servant of God is distinguished, and which therefore do not throw them out of a state of *Grace* and *Salvation*.

Thus *all* distinguish between actions that are *morally* evil, and those that are *imperfectly* good; between pursuing the things of the *Spirit* with some reluctance from the *Flesh*, and pursuing the things of the *Flesh* with the reluctance of the *Spirit*; betwixt those things that are called the *works* of the flesh, and those that are imperfect through

the *weakness* of the flesh: in the former the flesh takes part with the great tempter and deceiver of men; in the latter it is more slow and languid in joining heartily with those incitations to goodness, that are the motions of the *Spirit* of God. They make the *sins* of *weakness* partly voluntary and partly involuntary; to have so much choice and consent as to render them *Sins*, and yet to be so far involuntary as to make them *Infirmities*. They are agreed, that these sins or failures are not altogether to be avoided in this present imperfect state; they cleave to the best of *Christians*, and that too in the performance of the most *sacred* and *solemn services*; they are so stated as to be arguments of *imperfection*, but not of *presumption*; they are denoted by many names in our language, by which they are distinguished from crimes and vices that are flagrant and habitual; they are called *mistakes* and *errors*, *motes* and *blemishes*, *blots* and *imperfections*, *slips* and *frailties*, *defects* and *follies*, *neglects* and *wanderings*, *spots* and *infirmities*: they are committed about things in themselves more light and inconsiderable; or, if the matter be greater, they

they are suppressed in their first motions unindulged and over-ruled. They are such into which we are betrayed, by the common frailties of *human nature*, the misfortunes and infelicities of the *present state*, or other *innocent causes*, which it is our next business to reflect upon. And, secondly,

II. In general, as *all other*, so *these*, are owing to (the present degenerate state of *human nature*. This is the common spring of evil inclinations and aversions, the darkness of our minds, the obliquity of our wills, and the disorder of our passions. To this we may ascribe our wandering thoughts, our odd humours and uneven tempers, our inconstant likings and loathings, our successive vigour and weariness in the pursuit of the same objects.

But more particularly many of them are to be ascribed to inadvertency, and want of caution and consideration: For,

1<sup>st</sup>. Men do many things, and think no harm, their minds being otherwise employed, and not directly attending to what they are about: although if it were referred to their judgment, to declare *for* or *against* them, they would ingenuously acknowledge



acknowledge them to be wrong, and not offer to justify or excuse them. Many of them are occasioned by surprize, when men are not upon their guard, nor have time to consider what they are doing.

This seems to have been St. Paul's case, *Acts* xxiii. 5. when he stood before the chief priests and council, and was entering upon an honest defence of himself: *The high-priest commanded them that stood by to smite him on the mouth*; which unexpected treatment provoked him thus to express a hasty resentment: *God shall smite thee, thou whited wall; for sittest thou to judge me after the law, and commandest me to be smitten contrary to the law?* Which, when he was reprimanded for it, he confesses to have proceeded from his inconsideration: *I wist not, brethren, that it was the high-priest; for it is written, Thou shalt not speak evil of the ruler of thy people.*

2dly, Another cause; from which the more excusable failings of men proceed, is Custom and Example. They say and do like others, either because they take singularity to be a disagreeable character, or because they bring not the instances of their compliance and imita-

imitation under the *examen* of their reason, nor try them by those rules, that they must acknowledge themselves obliged to observe.

From hence we may account for a thousand little follies and indiscretions, that men of good sense and great piety are sometimes seen in. To this we may impute that almost infinite variety of habits and fashions that obtain in the world, and are changing *every age*, nay, *every year*; and to which, we must confess, persons of the best characters, and unquestionable modesty and virtue, are observed to conform. Nay, hither we may refer some things that, in their own nature, are much worse; such as many expressions and phrases, sounding too like, and bordering upon, oaths and imprecations; the profanation of God's *Day*, or *House*, or *Word*; numberless levities and fondnesses into which men fall, purely by observation of *their* common practice with whom they converse; which did they but reflect upon, or were seasonably reprov'd for, they would ingenuously condemn.

3dly, Another occasion of mens inconsiderate and undesigned failings, is, their low  
and

and mean Education. Small things make great impressions upon *weak minds*, whilst things of greater importance do but very little, or not at all, affect them. And therefore, without any *design* or *reflection*, they are, on all occasions, shewing their concern for the one, and betraying their want of taste or regard for the other: so that they come, not only to slight the *positive institutions* of *Christianity*, but even to neglect joining with others in the worship of God, and that without any uneasiness or remorse. Nay, even in their *last moments* they are still observed to be very much under the power of little things, and unaffected with the sense of God, and the concerns of eternity; and *that*, not so much from their ignorance, as from the habits of inconsideration, which they have contracted by their coarse breeding, or sordid way of living, to which, from their first years, they have been accustomed.

4<sup>thly</sup>, Another cause of mens *indeliberate* and *unintended failings*, is, natural Temper and Complexion. Such as arise from this principle, are committed with less design and reflection than others. 'Tis true, from hence we may account for many *wilful sins*,  
and

Ser. II. of Infirmary. 221

and *chosen follies*; but this is also the occasion of many instances of weaknesses and infirmity. To *this* may be imputed both indolence and passion; too long forbearance, or too keen resentment, of the mistakes or follies of our *friends* or *domesticks*. We may from hence account for the irresolution and unsteadiness of *some* mens conduct; and for the fears and distrusts with which *others* are perplexed, as to their temporal or spiritual concerns. *Freakishness* and *enthusiasm*, nay, a thousand atheistical or blasphemous thoughts, are intirely owing to mens unhappy constitutions, and are not so much to be esteemed their *faults* as *misfortunes*. Some mens tempers are *dull* and *phlegmatic*, and others more *mercurial* and *volatile*; and both one and the other are betrayed into neglects or mistakes, that are not to be reputed wilful or affected. Some are more deeply tinged with *conceit* and *vanity*, which break out into various instances of vain-glory and ostentation; for which they are sometimes pitied, and sometimes despised: but they are rather to be censured, as the *effects* of their *temper*, than the *faults* of their *wills*. Others are easy-na-  
8 tured,



tured, and desirous to oblige; and, by their promises and compliances to gratify the humours and interests of others, embarrass their circumstances, involve themselves in great inconveniences, and are sometimes precipitated into downright sins, without attending to what they are doing.

Thus, according to the variety of mens tempers, we may usually observe, that they are unawares betrayed into such *faults* or *indiscretions*, such *follies* or *vices*, as are most agreeable to them.

5thly, Besides these, not a few of mens hasty and unobserved frailties take their rise from some *natural Indisposition*, or *accidental Disappointment*, *Fatigue*, or *Vexation*. Sickness and Pain do often betray men into such mistakes and inadvertencies, as otherwise they would not be found in. Hence it was, that *Job*, by the continuance of his affliction, at last, impatiently curses the day of his birth, and uses a great many repining and fretful expressions, which very much differed from his general character.

So *David*, when he had, time after time, escaped the death that *Saul* was intending and preparing for him; when yet he still  
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continued to hunt him *like a partridge on the mountains*; although he had been anointed by the *Prophet*, and assured by the Divine promise, of succeeding *Saul* in the kingdom; yet he was so weary of posting and flying from one refuge to another, that at last he seems to be quite tired out, and utterly to despond of that deliverance, upon which he might reasonably depend: so that he said in his heart, *I shall one day perish by the hand of Saul*. But if the xxxist Psalm relates to this distrust, he afterwards confesses, that he said in his haste, he should at last be cut off from before the eyes of the LORD.

6thly, Another cause to which many infirmities are to be ascribed, is, that *Prejudice* and *Partiality*, which in most men are observable in one degree or other. This makes them quick in discovering any thing favourable in *themselves*, or *their cause*, or *party*, but more slow in observing or believing any thing that makes against them, whether it be an evidence in a Court of Justice, an argument in any debate, or a report of their friend or enemy.

Let us add to this, a credulous unsuspicious temper, joined with a veneration for  
serious

serious and sacred characters. This renders men too easy to be imposed upon, and sometimes betrays them into mistakes, out of which it is not easy to extricate themselves.

Of this we have a memorable instance in the Prophet sent to *Bethel*, to remonstrate against the idolatry of the court, *1 Kings xiii.* to whom it was given in charge, that he should eat no bread, nor drink water in that place: of which he was so mindful, that he rejected the invitation of the idolatrous king. But when a Prophet brought a pretended dispensation, so great was the reverence he had for his person and character, that he resigned himself up to his direction; and that quite contrary to the express command of Heaven.

Something like this is a superstitious reverence and veneration for things or persons sacred.

What was it in *St. John*, that made him throw himself down before the Angel, in a posture of adoration, but a sort of holy transport upon the occasion, and a warm and zealous concern to shew the humble sense he had of himself, and how grateful he was  
for

for the favour done him, by sending so glorious a messenger to him? But herein he exceeded what was expected, or what could be allowed. The Angel rejected the honour intended, and gave his worship and zeal a true direction to its proper object. But though this was a sort of superstitious excess of a holy passion, yet I cannot but think St. *John's* superstition and idolatry, stopping where it did, was a much less sin, than that man's severity, who would conclude, that it threw him out of a state of favour with GOD. He was doubtless sincere and pious, as well as humble, in that prostration; and GOD would look upon him with pity and pardon, though such a conduct as this could by no means merit his approbation.

*7thly,* There is another, and *that* a very innocent cause, to which this kind of failings may be imputed, and that is, the weakness of mens minds, the natural defect of their understanding. They can attend but to one thing at once; and whatever makes an extraordinary impression upon the mind, does, for the time, so intirely ingross it, that it mixes itself with every other thought, how important soever.



Hence it is we meet with so many complaints of the intrusion of foreign thoughts, when men are engaged in the *solemnities* of religion.

To the same cause we may ascribe another instance of human infirmity, and *that* is, letting things of importance slip out of our memories. The mind, being possessed by any one thing, is less attentive to others; and therefore they make less impression upon it, and sooner take their leave of it, and frequently betray persons into such omissions and neglects, as, if they were wilful, would be inexcusable.

8thly, and to mention no more, Mens inconsiderate and more excusable slips and frailties are often to be imputed to some prevailing passion, which hurries them on to do things less consistent with their constant temper and conduct. Upon this score it is, that many young persons act against the advice of their friends, or the directions of their parents. Their passions are strong, hard to be governed, impatient till they be gratified, and leave no room for sober thought and recollection.

We

We have an instance of prevailing passion of another kind in *Moses*, who, though, as to his general disposition, he was meek to a proverb; yet was so far transported with rage, when his brother and the *Israelites* were fallen into a gross and abominable *idolatry* in his short absence, that, out of indignation and resentment, he threw down the *tables* of the *law*, that were written with the *finger* of *God*, and brake them before their face. And again, when they murmured for water, he was so exceedingly provoked at their *distrust*, their *mutinies*, and *murmurs*, that he spake *unadvisedly with his lips*. For when *God* had ordered him only to *speak* to the *rock*, instead of that, he spake to the *rebels*, and *smote* the *rock*; for which reason *God* was so displeased with him, that he resolved he should not bring the *Israelites* into the *Land of Promise*: he was permitted from mount *Pisgah* to take a view of it, but was not suffered to set a foot within it.

It is owing to the rise of sudden and overpowering passion, that we observe men, otherwise very charitable and friendly, to envy or inwardly grieve at the success or prosperity of others; and when they hear

them commended out of respect, will yet dash their character with some less observed faults or follies; and, however they would conceal it, cannot help betraying some inward satisfaction, when they hear of their disappointment, or of any unprosperous turn of their fortunes. And what, but the power of passion, could engage men to persist in their mistakes and errors, when they have reason to be convinced of them? It is the shame of a retreat, that makes them push on, and go forward, in spite of the remonstrances of those *inward principles*, that should guide and reduce them.

We may also observe, that a warm zeal for the honour of God and Religion will often transport honest and well-meaning persons into such conduct, as is neither justifiable to God nor man. It was a fervent zeal for the honour of God, that made St. *James* and St. *John* move their LORD to have fire called from heaven upon the *Samaritans*, to consume them for the slight that they put upon him: and this made St. *Peter* rashly draw his sword in defence of his Master.

When from these, or any other causes, men fall into such sins as are consistent with  
a state

a state of *salvation*; that is, a sincere love of CHRIST, and an honest endeavour to please their Maker; their mistakes will pass for frailties and infirmities, under the *Gospel*, which requires *sincerity*, but does not insist upon *absolute perfection*, in our obedience, as the indispensable condition of our salvation. Such as these were the disputes amongst the Disciples about superiority, and other mistakes and errors that our Saviour reprov'd and rectified while he lived with them; their forgetfulness of their own resolutions and protestations; and the fear and confusion with which they were surpris'd, when their LORD was apprehended; when they denied him, forsook him, and fled from him. Such as these were the opposition between St. *Paul* and St. *Peter*, and the matter which gave occasion to it; the contention betwixt *Paul* and *Barnabas*, and their parting upon it, Such as these are the sins which very good Christians are constantly complaining of; *viz.* wandering thoughts, and want of zeal in their devotions; or spiritual pride and vain-glory, when they discharge themselves with more attention and fervour. Such as these are the inconstant



ebbings and flowings of their best and worst passions and affections; the weakness of their resolutions; uneasiness and anxiety about secular concerns, for want of perfect trust in God, and resignation to Divine Providence. Such are the inward motions to sin, that we find some of the greatest of the *primitive Christians* complaining of, after all their persecutions; diseases, and a long course of mortification. Such as these were the motions which obliged St. *Paul* to keep under his body, lest, after he had preached to others, he himself, by consenting to their importunate sollicitations, should fall into perdition.

Thus various are the springs from which our numberless Frailties and Infirmities are observed to proceed.

I should now go on to consider the guilt that is contracted; and shew that they *are sins*; and that they are worse than *sins of Ignorance*, but not so bad as *sins of Presumption*: that yet they are capable of very great aggravations, and sometimes committed after forethought and deliberation: that they will easily degenerate into wilful sins, and are to be confessed and forsaken by us. After  
this,

this, I should make some reflections upon the whole, and shew, that we should not judge of men by their sudden and particular failings; but that we ought to be charitable in our censures of our *neighbours*, and strict and severe in our animadversions upon *ourselves*, our *own ways* and *tempers*; and that we should fortify ourselves against *sins* of *weakness* and *infirmary*, by all the spiritual and natural means that are in our power.

All which particulars are worthy our consideration; but too much to be added to this discourse, and will furnish sufficient matter for another.

Now to GOD, &c.

Sept. 17. of January.

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SERMON XII.

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SERMON XII



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## S E R M O N XII.

MATTHEW xxvi. 41.

*The Spirit indeed is willing, but the  
Flesh is weak.*

**H**AVING first considered the Occasion  
and Sense of these words, I proposed  
to shew,

*First*, What are Sins of Weakness.

*Secondly*, The Causes to which they are  
to be ascribed: such as inadvertence and  
inconsideration, the surprize of temptation,  
custom and example, a low and mean edu-  
cation, natural complexion and constitution,  
pain or sickness, weariness or misfortunes,  
partiality and fondness for their friends or  
parties, an unsuspicious temper, superstition,  
and veneration for serious and sacred chara-  
cters, the natural defects and weakness of  
human

human understanding, or some importunate and prevailing passion. All these I have insisted upon, and produced examples, or Scripture instances, to illustrate and prove each particular. To which I might add divers other causes from which they take their rise; as natural timidity, irresolution and inconstancy, bashfulness and false modesty, which enervate the mind, and render it too weak to overcome a temptation. A mirthful and jocular turn of mind is also frequently betraying men into such slips and offences, as will not bear the application of the strict and severe rules of Christianity, although they are attended with less guilt, as they were free from any ill intention, and only meant to excite good humour, and deceive the tediousness of conversation.

Others spring from a strong passion for honour and pre-eminence, shew and grandeur, gaming, pleasure, and diversion: some also, from a weak judgment, may *do evil, that good may come*; and others, from a prevailing fear of offending on one hand, may be too much inclined to offend on the other, and may neglect good for fear of evil.

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They sometimes also take their rise from the narrowness of the line that parts between things lawful and sinful, and not seldom from the nearness of the objects of *sense*, the presence of which gives them great power over the mind, which is only in the *few* and the *best* as powerfully affected with the objects of *religion*, the things which are no otherwise to be seen but by *faith*, till we come into the other world.

Perhaps some of these I have now added, may, in strictness, be reducible to some of those on which I before insisted; about which I am not very solicitous, so long as we are sensible, that all these are the springs from which they are derived. I shall not any longer dwell upon them, but proceed,

*Thirdly*, To inquire into the Guilt that is contracted by such failures. And here we have to observe,

1. That they are Sins, and lay us under a necessity of repentance and amendment.

The confession of *David*, *Asaph*, and *St. Paul*, the sorrow and repentance of *St. Peter*, the resolution that God took about *Moses* and *Eli*, upon account of these kind of failings, do plainly prove, that they are  
so.



so many instances of ill conduct; and that we ought to confess and subdue them, to watch against them, and make all the amends we can for them.

2. It is also evident, that these Sins of Frailty and Weakness are much worse than the Sins of pure Ignorance; forasmuch as information is wanting in the one case; but in the other there is knowlege, and only a defect in the attention: the rule and the action are not brought together, nor the reasons for or against the thing considered as they ought to be.

3. But though they are worse than the Sins of Ignorance, yet there are others of a deeper dye, and much more heinous in the sight of God. For sins being measured by the will, where there is more of *this*, and the person more directly and deliberately consents to the wickedness, he thereby contracts a much greater degree of guilt.

And for this reason we may conclude, that there are very different degrees of these Sins of Infirmity: for some are committed by surprize, and others after deliberation. The first motions of many sins surprise men; and if they be immediately

checked and suppressed, they will not be imputed to them as their faults: but if they be entertained and indulged, a proportionable degree of guilt will attend them. Other sins may not surprize them, but be chosen after some reflection and consultation, as a less evil, to prevent or avoid a greater.

Which is plain in the case of *Abraham*: There was an exprefs contract betwixt him and his wife, that at every place where they thought the fear of God was not in the inhabitants, she should say of him, that he was her brother; as it appears to us, out of a distrust of Providence, or an overpowering fear of the bad consequences with which the discovery of their true relation would be attended.

Now, according to the nature, scandal, or bad example, of these sins, the habits which they tend to breed, the advantages they give the tempter, or the aggravating circumstances that attend them, they displease and offend the Almighty.

For it is to be observed, in the fourth place, that these Sins of Frailty and Infirmity are capable of very high degrees of aggravation. Very great sins may men be transported into  
by

by sudden and violent passions, melancholy vapours, and a disturbed imagination: and yet, these happening before the act of sinning, and, as it were, drawing or driving them into it, the guilt is not so great, as it is when they sin with a reluctancy of conscience in the very act and commission of it. For here both sides of the question are in view, and the worst is chosen after some misgivings of heart, and remonstrances of conscience, which is a very great aggravation of the act.

As they run into vice, and commit bad things, against their judgments, it is an argument of their infirmity and weakness: but as they act counter to their judgments, and overbear their consciences, it is an argument of presumption and wilfulness. As the conscience is controuled or suppressed, it shews that it is very weak and languid, and only discovers itself to be alive by some faint and expiring groans.

Now that they are capable of very great degrees of aggravation, we see in the instance of one of the *most forward*, and in all appearance the *best resolved*, of all the Apostles. After St. Peter had long conversed with his Saviour, had heard his Sermons, and seen

his miracles, was chosen as a witness of his transfiguration, had heard the voice from Heaven, declaring him to be the beloved Son of GOD; after he had been saved by our Lord from perishing in the sea; after he had made a plain confession, that JESUS was the CHRIST, *the Son of the living GOD*; after his Saviour had kindly reproved him for one failing, and charitably warned him of the other that he foresaw he would fall into; nay, after this very Apostle had formed and declared his resolution, rather to die with his Lord than deny him; after all this, I say, when it might have been expected that he would have been upon his guard, yet he denied his Redeemer, repeated that denial again, and again; nay, confirmed it with oaths and curses.

And yet, though it was very flagrant, involved him in great guilt, gave him many a pang, and cost him many a penitential tear, I think we need not scruple to say, it was one of these Sins of Frailty and Infirmity; because it was to be ascribed to a prevailing passion, an overpowering fear of losing his life, or his liberty, if he should at that time confess the relation he bore to his Master. He was



all the while possessed of a sincere affection for his Master, which altho' it did not just operate at this critical and nice conjuncture, and inspire him with that courage and boldness, that it did before and after this; yet the habit of it was settled and deep-rooted in his heart, governed the main actions of his life, preserved him in a state of *salvation*, and rendered him an object of the love and pity of his Redeemer.

Once more, these Sins of Frailty and Infirmary, to what special cause forever they are to be ascribed, do easily degenerate into, and are frequently attended with, Sins of Wilfulness and Presumption.

This is evident in the case of *David*: He happened to be surprised with the sight of the beautiful *Bathsheba*; and had he only reflected upon and admired the work of God and nature, in which such exquisite skill was expressed, and upon which the great Creator had stamped his Divine image, he had been free from the guilt of either presumption or frailty: or if, by gazing too much upon such an agreeable object, and finding himself surprised with the first motions of irregular desires, he had checked them in  
their

their infancy, and, by giving way to his reason and conscience, had intirely suppressed them, all had been well still; this had been only an instance of human weakness, and would not have had any wilfulness in it: but to send messengers to take her, and actually to defile her, when upon inquiry he found she was another man's wife, rendered his sin too flagrant for an infirmity, and involved him in so much guilt, that he could expect no salvation, without such a repentance as was proportional to the transgression in all its circumstances. And further, when he had notice from her, that she was with child, to send for her husband out of the army, with an intention to hide the sin, and prevent the shame, might be imputed to a tenderness for her's, and his own reputation. But, finding this did not answer according to his expectation, to write a letter to the general, to send it by this honest man, and therein to order him to be *set in the forefront of the hottest battle*, and that the rest should *retire from him, that he might be smitten and die*, raised his sin to such a degree of wilfulness and presumption, as richly deserved those

rivers of penitential tears; that he poured out on this sad occasion; and, after all, will stand as an indeleble stain, and just exception, in his character and reputation to the end of the world. I come now,

*Fourthly*, As the best use and improvement of what has been said, to consider how necessary it is for us to reflect upon our very frailties and infirmities, and that as particularly as we can; to confess them with humility and contrition, sincerely and expressly to repent of them, earnestly to implore God's pardon, diligently to guard against them, and carefully to avoid them; and then we may confidently hope they will never rise up in judgment against us; which if they do, they will be found too heavy for us to bear, and greater than we can answer for.

2. Let us learn also not to judge of the state of men, with respect to the favour of God, by their particular failings, but by the constant tenor of their lives. If we should form our judgment of *Noah*, by the account we have of his drunkenness; of *Abraham*, by his denying and exposing his wife; of *Job*, by his fretful expostulations; of

*Moses*,

*Moses*, by his passionate resentment of the idolatry and murmuring of the *Israelites*; or of *St. Peter*, by his denying his Redeemer; we should very much injure their characters: for, by the constant course of their lives it appears, that they were all very eminent and worthy persons; and these frailties are not recorded as matter of reproach to them, but as so many warnings to us, that we, by the consideration of their infirmities, may be admonished always to be upon our guard to keep out of the way of temptation; to look up to heaven, from whence our direction and help are to come; and neither presume upon our knowledge or resolution, our strength and power, our sincerity, or any thing else, so far as to conclude ourselves safe, and out of the danger of our spiritual enemies: for our wisdom is but folly, our strength is weakness, our natures are degenerate, and our wills and passions perverse and unruly. We lie easily open to sin and folly, and, unless we put ourselves under the protection of God's Spirit, and stand upon our guard, we shall not live a day, an hour, without lapsing into



one irregularity or other, and making sad experiments of our weakness and frailty.

3. We should be instructed to be charitable in our censures of others, and not ascribe that to their *wills*, which is to be imputed to their *passions*; but rather make all the kind allowances that the case will bear, and consider their infirmities, when we are going to accuse them of presumption.

4. But yet, since we are every one in danger of being betrayed, by partiality and self-love, into a better opinion of ourselves than we ought to have, and to make excuses and apologies, where confessions and acknowledgements would more become us; let us take heed lest we soften our wilful or presumptuous sins, by ascribing them to our weakness and frailties; remembering always, that although our hearts may deceive us, yet God cannot be deceived, but will at last pass a sentence upon us, according to the several degrees of malignity and wilfulness that attend our transgressions. It is also necessary to be observed, that although many of the causes to which our Infirmities may be ascribed are innocent,  
yet

yet very great degrees of guilt may attend the sins themselves. And though our very frame and constitutions incline us to some sort of sins above others, yet God is not chargeable with the guilt of those sins; because he has given us also superior powers and faculties to over-rule them, and is also ready to assist us in our honest endeavours. We ought therefore to watch against them, out of regard to the honour of our Creator, and also in order to our own safety and happiness.

Finally, Since even the Sins of Weakness are great imperfections, and sometimes attended with great degrees of guilt, and too often degenerate into wilful sins, and lay a foundation of that grief and remorse, that to some weak minds may be of fatal consequence; it must be advisable, that we arm ourselves as much as may be against all the occasions and temptations that we may meet with to this kind of sins. Some may be strengthened by proper advice and caution, others by self-denial and mortification; and many too are to be assisted by nothing so much as *medicine*, and a due *regimen*, where a proper treatment of the body would

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be the way of rendering the care of the soul successful.

For as the great adversary takes all advantages he can against us, we have need to fortify ourselves by all the means in our power against his malicious assaults and temptations. And as we consist of flesh and spirit, body and soul, we should take care of both, that one, as well as the other, may be disposed for the offices of religion, that neither of them may be the unhappy instruments of leading us into sin and perdition.

And as some may find the benefit of one of these methods and preservatives, and others of another, so all may be fortified against sin by vigilance and devotion; which are the means that our Lord recommends to his disciples, when he advises them to *watch and pray, lest they enter into temptation*; for, although *the Spirit be willing*, and well disposed, yet *the Flesh is weak*, easily surprized and overpowered.

Now to God, &c.

S. E. R.

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# SERMON XIII.

CONCERNING

# S I N S

OF

# PRESUMPTION.

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S E R M O N XIII

PSALM XIX. 13.

Keep back thy servant also from Pre-

sumptions: lest I be not have



dominion over

I t is too plain to need any proof, that  
 as we are God's creatures, we ought to  
 be his servants. And that we may not be  
 ignorant of our duty, he has very expressly  
 made it manifest to us, partly by reason, and  
 more plainly still by revelation. But every  
 day's observation of others, as well as our  
 own constant experience, convince us, that  
 our situation here is peculiarly unhappy. We  
 have great impediments and powerful ene-  
 mies to encounter, before we can engage  
 ourselves, as we ought to do, in the service  
 of our Master. the devil is always attempt-

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## S E R M O N XIII.

PSALM xix. 13.

*Keep back thy servant also from Presumptuous Sins; let them not have dominion over me.*

**I**T is too plain to need any proof, that as we are GOD's creatures, we ought to be his servants. And that we may not be ignorant of our duty, he has very expressly made it manifest to us, partly by reason, and more plainly still by revelation. But every day's observation of others, as well as our own constant experience, convince us, that our situation here is peculiarly unhappy. We have great impediments and powerful enemies to encounter, before we can engage ourselves, as we ought to do, in the service of our Master: the devil is always attempt-  
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ing to alienate us from him; the world is ~~also constantly endeavouring to withdraw us from his service; and, what is still worse,~~ there is a party within us, that is always ready to betray us. So that the odds is very great, that we shall be too weak to stand it out, and persevere in our allegiance to Heaven. But yet it is no small consolation to sincere and ingenuous minds, to be assured he is ready to succour us in our contest with these adversaries, and assist us in the performance of his service, provided that we make proper applications to him for that purpose; the methods of doing which we discover, both from the institutions and injunctions of Heaven, and the practice and example of the best of men: one of which methods we find the *Psalmist* taking in this text, where he prays, that God would preserve him *from Presumptuous Sins*, that they may *not have dominion over him*.

This is a subject that deserves our most serious attention; and, in treating of it, I propose to inquire in this Discourse,

I. What Sins may be called Wilful or Presumptuous.

II. How

II. How far God may be said to *keep back* his servants from them.

III. Why God sometimes permits his servants to fall into them.

I. As to the *first* inquiry: There is some distinction betwixt Wilful and Presumptuous Sins, if we strictly consider the sense of the words, either in the sacred writings, or common language; For, although every thing Presumptuous be also Wilful, yet every Wilful Sin is not Presumptuous. And therefore, in stating and explaining them, I will distinguish betwixt them; but shall afterwards discourse of them jointly, as the following articles respect the one, as well as the other, in every instance.

1. Let us *first* consider, what Sins may properly be called *Wilful*. And, in general, those may be so called, that flow from the Will, and are chosen after some thought and deliberation. More particularly, they are such as, by being committed against the plain dictates, the express remonstrances, of natural conscience, the known declaration of the holy Scriptures, or express cautions and admonitions grounded upon them, are distinguish'd from Sins of Ignorance. They  
are



are such as by being committed with inclination and design, or such as by indulgence and repetition being become habitual, cannot pass for frailties or infirmities; such as are rather to be imputed to mens perverseness than weakness; to the faults of their wills and dispositions, than the strength and impetuosity of their passions. And these are sometimes no more than single instances, committed by persons, that in the main live well, and which are quite contrary to the general course of their actions. Sometimes they are habitual, and committed either with design and contrivance, and a diligent observation of proper opportunities; or else in compliance with every temptation that offers, and using every opportunity that presents itself to their purpose.

In Wilful Sins, a law is published and known, and an action committed, or duty neglected, in plain contradiction to it. *The spirit argues against the flesh, and the flesh against the spirit*; there is a debate raised within; and one part of the man takes one side, and another the other side of the question. Mens consciences urge the reason  
and

and authority of the law; and their affections, lusts, or passions, urge them to transgress it, in opposition to their consciences. In these cases the sin is wilful; it is chosen and deliberate: *Chosen*, I say, either directly, in the particular action, or indirectly, and in just interpretation: as we choose *the cause* of the transgression. When the liberty of choice is taken away, as to some particular actions, omissions, or incapacities, yet if we used our liberty, as to their causes, by interpretation, we shall be judged as wilfully guilty of those crimes, that proceeded from them, as if we had been expressly and particularly guilty of them. So although some be the effects of drunkenness, some of violent passion, and some of contracted habits, though some be the effects of inconsideration; yet, if we act leisurely, and had time enough to consider better of it, neither habits, or passions, or any other cause that was itself chosen, can be pretended in abatement of the sins, into which they betrayed us.

If, by extravagance, and ill husbandry, we become incapable of doing justice to the world, in the payment of our debts, or pro-

provision for our families; yet these incapacities will not bear us out: for as the causes of the same were chosen by us, the effects and consequences will be as much imputed to us, as if we neglect or refused to do justly and well, when we were perfectly able to do it.

2. But, *secondly*, as to presumptuous Sins, they are not only wilful, but something worse: They are committed against knowledge, and with the consent of the will, as well as the other; and also with lesser or greater degrees of contempt and confidence, pride and insolence.

And, to be more particular, they are such as these that follow: Going on in our own way, and confiding in our own wisdom and power, against the express order and direction of Heaven, as the *Israelites* did, *Deut.* 1. 43. when they would go up the hill, contrary to the direction of *Moses*. So speaking, in the name of God, what God had not given in charge, or commanded, was a Presumptuous Sin, *Deut.* xviii. 20, 22. — Going to the utmost extent of what is lawful, in confidence of stopping there.

Running



Running into the way of temptations, with an ill-grounded confidence in their own strength, or of meeting with the assistance of Divine Grace.

Exposing themselves to needless dangers, in times or places of infection.

Attempting things of very hazardous issues, without urgent and just occasion, out of too great confidence in their own constitutions, or pretended hopes of the Divine preservation.

Doing ill things in hopes of being brought off, by the authority or interest of their friends.

Committing and repeating their sins, in hopes that they shall take up in good time, and repent, or that they shall meet with indulgence and mercy from Heaven.

Attempting things above the power of human nature, and comparable only to the *Divine*, without any reason to depend upon the extraordinary appearance of Providence.

Appealing to the priest or judge of old, and not abiding by their sentence, but deviating from it on the right hand, or on the left, was a presumptuous sin. Affecting



to be wiser or juster than those that were put in authority over them, and, consequently, thinking contemptuously of those that were so dignified and distinguished by Heaven, and setting up themselves as both parties and judges in the same cause. *Deut.* xvii. 8---13.

Usurping or invading civil or sacred offices; as did *Korah* and his accomplices, and the two kings *Saul* and *Uzziah*.

Expecting the ends of religion, without using the *means* of knowledge and grace, that GOD has been pleased to establish.

And, to mention one of another kind, and in a lower degree, Neglecting the means that are in our power for the recovery of our health, in confidence of the strength of our constitutions, or the interposition of Divine Providence: or, on the other hand, trusting so intirely to the virtue of natural means, or *second causes*, as to neglect the First Cause and Fountain from whence every good thing is derived.

Let us add, that they are guilty of sinning presumptuously, who deliberate, contrive, design, and resolve to do wickedly. So the man is said to kill his neighbour presumptuously,

ously, who lay in wait to do it, *Exod. xxi.*

14.

And thus they stand opposed to Sins of Ignorance, Inadvertence, or Misfortunes.

Those also, of whom we read, *Nehem. ix. 16, 17.* who *dealt proudly, and hardened their necks, and hearkened not to the commandments, and refused to obey*, sinned presumptuously, by the secret contempt that it argued; as *they* do, by an open contempt and defiance, who sin with an *high hand*, *Num. xv. 30.* and a wicked design to bring the Law of God into contempt and dishonour; that confidently dare, and boldly defy the Almighty; that trample upon his laws, and despise his authority; that, as the *Psalmist* expresses it, *offend of malicious wickedness*; that, by their words and actions, in repeated instances, give notorious evidence of the contempt of every thing sacred; that live as those that say, *Who is lord over us?* and neglect the plainest instances of their duty either to Heaven or earth, and run into practices condemned by Scripture and reason, the religion of nature, as well as the laws of our Redeemer.

These, and such-like, fall under the class of Presumptuous Sins; and from these God is pleased to *keep back* his servants, now in one degree, then in another, as seems best to his infinite wisdom and goodness. Which is the next article that I proposed to insist upon.

II. And under this we are to observe, 1<sup>st</sup>, He sometimes suffers them to go no farther than the purpose and intention to commit them. So he is said to *turn the hearts* of persons; *i. e.* to change their designs and resolutions.

2<sup>dly</sup>, He sometimes lets them go so far, as to make some preparation to accomplish their bad designs; and then checks them, and keeps them back from proceeding any farther. We have several instances of this kind in sacred story: those of *Esau* and *Laban* against *Jacob*, and that of *David* against *Nabal*, are so well known, that it is unnecessary to enlarge upon them.

3<sup>dly</sup>, God sometimes permits men to make some initial attempts, but stops them before the sin is perfected. We have an instance of this in *Joseph's* brethren, who had made some steps towards his destruction; but

GOD interposed, and opened a way for his deliverance from them.

4thly, and lastly, GOD may suffer them to proceed from one act and degree of sin to another, and yet stop them before they have contracted wicked habits; or, if they become habitual, yet, by the power of his heavenly Grace, he breaks the enchantment, rescues them out of its power and slavery, brings them to recollection and repentance, and effectually recovers and reduces them, before the sin has got *dominion* over them.

III. Let us consider, in the next place, why GOD does not always thus, but sometimes permits his servants to fall into them.

We ought not over-boldly to inquire into the reasons for which GOD may permit the tempter to assault his servants, and leave them in his hands, and suffer him to overcome them for a season; nor would I have any habitual impenitent sinners to make any other application of what I shall say upon this head, than to consider, that GOD's permission to sin is not from any justification of it; and that there is a wide difference betwixt the case of *David*, who, in the main part



of his life, was not only unblameable, but exemplary, and the case of those who seldom set any good example, but their whole life is a train of mistakes and transgressions. Nay, let not any, who have so much as run into one wilful sin, against their own knowledge and conscience, flatter themselves with the opinion of being in God's favour, because *David* was so, although he fell into very great sins, unless their repentance be as evident and exemplary as *his*.

It is his case, and such-like, who were at least as eminent in repentance, as they were scandalous in their failings, that I have in view, when I consider the designs of Providence, in permitting them to fall in the day of temptation.

The ordinary and usual way of God is, to *keep back* those that are careful of their ways, from *presumptuous sins*. But yet he may sometimes think fit to permit his servants to fall into them, that, having made the experiment of their own weakness, and of the power and subtilty of *Satan*, and feeling less or more of the bitter consequences of their sins, they may be disposed to more caution and watchfulness, to more humility

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humility and modesty, to more distrust and jealousy of their own hearts, to more care and resolution, to a stricter guard upon their own lives and actions, and to more constant and stedfast dependence upon Heaven.

When good men fall, and rise again, they are more affected with love to God, have a more transporting sense of his Goodness and Mercy, which shine forth in the redemption of the world, by the death and passion of their Redeemer. They admire and adore God for the wise and merciful institution of the means of Pardon and Grace, and are more devout and constant in the use of them: they are more earnest and importunate with God, both for their own and their brethrens pardon: they are more tender and zealous of God's honour, which they have injured or blasphemed, and more diligent in their endeavours to wipe off the stain and reproach which they have thrown upon their sacred profession: they are more gentle and moderate in their censures of those that fall, making all the charitable allowances and kind apologies for them, which the case will bear: they are more solicitous to prevent any foul and dishonourable lapses

in their brethren, more skilful in directing them to keep clear of those rocks upon which they themselves had run, and more judicious and quick in discerning the devices and designs of hell: they are more careful to restore those that have fallen, *in the spirit of meekness*, and more forward and glad to administer hope and comfort to those that are grieved and wearied with the burden of their sins. It is their desire and delight to strengthen and confirm those that truly repent, and they are more attentive and vigilant to prevent any future Relapses.

And as good men themselves make such a good use of their own faults and follies, so do others that hear of them. They are warned against security and self-confidence; they are admonished to be upon their guard, to beware of the wiles of hell, to keep close to their duty, to stand out of the way of temptation, to fix their hearts and hopes upon the grace and assistance of GOD, and the mediation and intercession of CHRIST.

Besides, GOD may, in his great wisdom, permit even the best of men to fall into very great sins, that they may afterwards shew the world, by their example, what it is to repent.

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repent. And so we see, in the case of *David* and *St. Peter*, what grief and trouble their sins gave them, what floods of penitent tears they cost them; how humbly they confessed them to Heaven, how earnestly they cried night and day to God for his pardon; how stedfastly they resolved against them, and how well they kept those resolutions, never once more relapsing into them, but using their constant and utmost care and diligence to make the best amends they could, both to God and the Church, for the occasion they had given the enemy to blaspheme.

So that, if the fall of good men be scandalous, their rise and recovery is glorious: if the strength and policy of hell be seen in the one, the power and goodness of Heaven is displayed in the other.

Thus, in the issue and consequences, it proves, that those very things by which the devil seems to intend the enlargement and confirmation of his empire, are the occasion of its decay and subversion: so much is the wisdom and goodness of God superior to all the policy and malice of hell.

I should proceed to inquire, by what methods God is pleased to do this; why we should



should pray, that he would keep us back from them; and what we ought to *do* at the same time that we thus *pray*. But these articles are too important to be dispatched in so few words, as to be brought into this discourse. I will therefore suspend them, and conclude with the following reflections.

As these Sins of Wilfulness and Presumption are of such a nature, as can neither be imputed to Ignorance nor Infirmity, they must be attended with so much more guilt, and expose us to so much greater danger. They waste the conscience, they arm God's wrath against us, and provoke him to visit us with scourges and terrors. We must therefore be sensible of the great obligation we are under to God, for having taken, and still taking, so many blessed methods to keep us back from them; and, consequently, it must be incumbent upon us to attend to this Law, and consider the reason upon which it is founded; to be observant of his Providences; and to enter into ourselves, when we meet with personal afflictions. We should set our hearts open to receive the blessed influences of his Holy Spirit, and let our ears be open to the reproofs and admonitions of  
our

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our Christian friends, and spiritual pastors; that so we may keep our consciences awake; that temptations may not surprize us; or, if they do, that we may be proof against all the assaults of our spiritual enemies, and, by the assistance of Divine Grace, may be kept *back from presumptuous sins*, either altogether, or so far, that they may *not have dominion over us*.

Sermon of Redemption  
 Our Christian friends and spiritual pastors  
 that to we may keep our consciences awake  
 that temptations may not surprise us; or if  
 they do, that we may be proof against all  
 the assaults of our spiritual enemies, and  
 by the strength of Divine Grace may be  
 kept safe from temptation, and finally  
 together, or to say that they may be free  
 from temptation.

CONCLUDING

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REDEMPTION

SEE

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SERMON XIV.

CONCERNING

S I N S

OF

PRESUMPTION.

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SERMON XIV.

CONCERNING



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PRESCRIPTION.

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## S E R M O N XIV.

PSALM xix. 13.

*Keep back thy Servant also from Presumptuous Sins ; let them not have dominion over me.*

**T**HE sins into which men fall are not more commonly than usefully distinguished into those of *Ignorance, Weakness,* and *Presumption*. Those of the last class are they, that this *text* leads us to reflect upon ; which being the most dangerous and fatal, we ought to be more careful to avoid them, and need to be more warned against them.

In a former discourse I have shewn,

- I. What sins are presumptuous, or wilful.
- II. How far God may be said to *keep back* his servants from them. And,
- III. Why he sometimes *permits* even his servants to fall into them.

And shall now proceed to consider,

*First*, The methods by which GOD does it.

*Secondly*, The reason why we should pray to GOD to keep us from them. And,

*Thirdly*, What it concerns us to *do*, at the same time, that we thus *pray*.

I. The methods by which GOD keeps his servants from Presumptuous Sins are various.

The prohibitions of his Law operate upon the minds of some, upon theirs especially, that are under the direction of his ministers, and the influences of his Holy Spirit. The severities of his Providence are a check upon others. When the rest of the *Israelites* saw the fatal destruction of *Korah*, and his associates, they must needs stand in awe of GOD, and not dare *presumptuously* to rebel against him. So when the man that appealed to the prie stand judge, *Deut. xvii. 12.* would yet do presumptuously, and not hearken unto them, to submit to their sentence and authority, that man was to die; which when all the people should hear, they would fear, and do no more presumptuously. When *Achan's* sin found him out, and was visited upon him, and his family, all that were eye-

eye-witnesses of it, would take it as a sad warning against *sacrilege*, or appropriating that to their private and proper use, which was solemnly devoted to God. The sudden death of *Uzza*, the judgments denounced against *Saul*, and the leprosy of *Uzziah*, would check and restrain all that heard each dreadful story, as they valued their own safety, and the prosperity of their families, from invading the sacred office of God's priests, lest they should expose themselves to the like visitations.

And sometimes God keeps back his servants from Presumptuous Sins, by the afflictions and visitations of his Providence, upon their persons, or fortunes, thereby happily indisposing them for, and kindly disabling them to commit those sins, to which he foresees they will be powerfully tempted. So by *the thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan*, with which Saint *Paul* was buffeted, God kept him back from that pride and vain-glory, to which he was tempted by the abundance of the revelations with which he had been favoured, 2 Cor. xii. 7.

Let us add another method, by which God is sometimes pleased to do this; and



that is, by the influences of his Spirit; whereby he inlightens their minds, and makes them more clearly apprehend the true sense of his law, than they would do, if they were left to themselves. We do not say, that he now illuminates mens minds, with any new truths, that are not revealed in the Scripture; but only that, by the influences of the Holy Spirit, he presents those standing truths to their consideration, and imprints them with that efficacy and clearness, that they more perfectly understand them, and more heartily assent to them; and, by consequence, under this influence, they keep clear of such Presumptuous Sins, as they would otherwise fall into. By His special Grace *He* also sanctifies their natures, purifies their wills, subdues their passions, and impresses his own Divine Image upon them: the consequences of which must needs be, a diligent and effectual care to stand clear of presumptuous offences. By the same special Grace *He* also assists and enables them to do their duty, both to heaven and earth, with so much sincerity and perfection, as will not consist with wilful and presumptuous transgressions.

And

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And finally, GOD is often pleased, for this end, to make free agents the instruments of his Providence. So, by the intervention of the *Midianitish* merchants, *He* prevented the death of *Joseph*, which his brethren had been deliberating and resolving upon. And, by the seasonable and prudent interposition of *Nabal's* wife, *David* was kept back from executing a cruel and rash design, which he had formed against him, and all his house. And when *Abishai* was meditating the death of his sovereign, king *Saul*, *David* interposed, and prevented him, saying, *Destroy him not; for who can stretch forth his hand against the LORD's anointed, and be guiltless?* And how frequently does it now happen, that our christian friends, or pastors, are the blessed instruments of Providence, to dissuade and divert us from many bad things, about which we deliberated, and which we intended?

II. The next article I proposed to inquire into is, upon what accounts we should be solicitous to pray to GOD, to keep us back from presumptuous sins.

*First*, And this we should do in regard of our degeneracy and weakness, which is

such, that without the Divine assistance we cannot always stand upright.

*Secondly*, The subtilty, power, and malice of our spiritual enemy, does also render this necessary. He is very well acquainted with all the springs of human nature, and easily discovers on which side each of us lies most exposed, and by what kind of temptations he may most effectually surprize and overcome us; and when once we are engaged in his service, it will not be easy to get our discharge. We cannot tell what permission GOD may give him, nor how far, and how long, our incaution, and neglect of prayer, may provoke his Holy Spirit to desert us, and leave us in his hands; which if He do, that malignant being will find the victory cheap and easy.

He that could overcome our first parents in paradise, when they were in a state of perfect innocence, and had nothing within to betray them, but stood upon greater advantage than any of their degenerate offspring do; he that could baffle *David*, who was a man after GOD's own heart; he that could befool *Solomon*, who was the wisest of men; he that could so shamefully overthrow

Saint

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Saint *Peter*, within the sight, and after the express warning, of his Saviour, after all his protestations and resolutions, and notwithstanding that fervent affection, that he bore to his LORD; will easily seduce and overcome any of us, if we be deserted of Heaven, and left to ourselves, for want of our hearty and fervent prayers, that GOD would be with us, and keep us back from Presumptuous Sins.

*Thirdly*, We ought thus to pray in regard of the malignity of sin. It will despoil us of the Divine Image, stain and defile us, and render us, if not an offensive spectacle to the world, yet truly odious and detestable to Heaven; and, by degrees, it will transform us into the likeness of satan, and bring us to a habit of thinking and acting, like his vassals.

*Fourthly*, We should pray that GOD would keep us back from Presumptuous Sins, because of the dangerous consequence of them. These are sins to which the Old Law promised no pardon, and for which it prescribed no sacrifices, but left those that committed them to the justice and severity of their Judge. And they are as provoking to



GOD now, as they were then; and the consequences of them are still as fatal to us: fatal in this world, as they darken the understanding, waste the conscience, and tend to produce the worst habits: they either fear or stupefy the conscience, and so put men entirely under the direction and power of the devil; or else they enrage it, and kindle such flames in their breasts, as torment them next to the fires, for which they prepare them. Mens bodies are not without their share of the sorrows occasioned by Presumptuous Sins. Nothing is more pernicious to health, and the just and even harmony, and temper of the blood and spirits, in which it consists, than sin is. This was the first cause of pain and death, and still continues to operate in the same way, to ruin and deface the works of GOD and Nature. Besides this, their estates are in danger, often impaired, and sometimes consumed, by such sins. Some of them directly tend to impoverish those that commit them; others do it by consequence, forasmuch as they arm Providence against them; in which case they can neither promise themselves a steady prosperity, nor a sanctified poverty. Their good names are also

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also blasted and ruined by Presumptuous Sins, especially when they are notorious and customary. Men of sense and virtue will think of vicious characters, and habitual sinners, as they deserve; and will trust them no further than they have a curb upon them. Nay, we often observe, that the most profligate and licentious will neither approve of, nor make any favourable apologies for, those that act like them, but will think and speak of them as the most abandoned wretches.

And, as to the next world, such sins tend to involve men in all the woe and misery that human nature is capable of sustaining. Darkeness of the understanding, perverseness of the will, distraction of passions, exquisite pain and torment, both of body and mind, to reflect upon what they have lost in Heaven, and what they feel, and must for ever endure in hell, are the sad rewards of wilful sins in the future state.

III. But then we are never to forget what it concerns us to to *do*, at the same time that we thus *pray*.

1. As, first, we ought to keep out of the way of temptations; for if we pray ever so fervently and constantly, that God would

keep us back from Presumptuous Sins, yet if we do not also watch, and avoid the occasions of sinning, we shall pray in vain, and soon make a melancholy experiment of our weakness and hypocrisy.

2. We ought also to exert our natural powers, in order to inform our minds with the knowlege of GOD, and heavenly things; to fix our wills upon that which is good, to restrain and regulate our inordinate desires and affections, to perform the outward and material parts of religion and virtue.

If we pray to GOD to keep us back from Presumptuous Sins, it supposes, that we first do what we are able ourselves; that we lay such restraints upon our thoughts, words, and actions, our senses, and our passions, as reasonable creatures are capable of: which if we are not careful to do, we shall in vain expect, that GOD should so far interest himself for us, as to prevent what we are resolved upon.

3. Let us add, that whatever prudent and christian methods are taken to prevent our running into, or persisting in, such ways as lead to ruin, we should look upon them as the kind intentions of Providence, to keep

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keep us back from Presumptuous Sins, or to break such habits and customs, as would otherwise expose us to eternal perdition.

4. We should, at the same time, together with our prayers, use such means of knowledge and grace, as GOD has appointed to inform our minds, and to sanctify our natures. Since GOD has ordained these, as the means of restoring that light and rectitude, which we have lost; of healing the wounds that sin has made; of improving our spiritual strength; and of enabling us to do, what of ourselves we should not attain to without them; so long as we neglect those means, it is in vain to pretend, we are sincerely desirous, that GOD would keep us back from Presumptuous Sins.

In a word, we must take care to be, what we learn, from this text, we ought to be, when we pray thus, that is, GOD's *servants*; applying ourselves with care and sincerity, both to learn and perform what is agreeable to the will of GOD, and to avoid what we know will displease him. One that lives under the dominion of sin, can with a very ill grace, and no hopes of being heard, put  
up



up such a petition to Heaven, as supposes him to be one of God's servants.

These are the most material points, that this text offers to our consideration; which being all practical, I will but just make a reflection or two upon the whole; the relation of which to the foregoing discourse, and their usefulness in the Christian Life, I hope may intitle them to your regard.

The first of which may solicit our charity, and awaken our caution; our charity upon the lapses of others, our caution to prevent our own. Although our Christian brethren fall into some Presumptuous Sins, yet our Christian charity may dispose us to hope, that they may yet be the servants of God, honest and sincere in the main, and in a state of favour and friendship with Almighty God. And this we have reason to hope, when they neither repeat nor excuse their sins, but patiently and thankfully receive the reproofs and admonitions of their Christian friends; when they humbly confess them, express their sorrow and trouble to reflect upon them; when they not only avoid them for the future, undo any bad things

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things they are chargeable with, as much as they can, and give such tokens of penitential sorrow, as make it appear to be sincere ; otherwise, they cannot be intitled to such a charitable opinion. And, on the contrary, we are not to presume upon our own safety, nor conclude that we are sufficiently guarded against Presumptuous Sins, because we look upon ourselves to stand in the relation of servants to our great LORD and Master in Heaven : for this relation, without answerable care and caution, will be no defence or protection, but will rather expose us to more violent assaults of our spiritual enemies. As long as there is an enmity betwixt Heaven and hell, so long will Satan have the confidence to make his attacks upon the best of men ; and in his hellish policy will still conclude, that if he can make any visible impression upon such, it will promote the interest of his empire, more than a complete victory over those of less distinction. And therefore is there an absolute necessity, for every one *that thinketh he standeth, to take heed lest he fall.*

2. We learn from hence, that the Redemption of mankind from the power and guilt

guilt of sin, was a matter of the last necessity. If those whose characters shine brightest in sacred story, did yet fall into very great sins, and so stood in need of a Saviour, much more do they, whose lives are a *series* of transgressions, or whose *lapses* are more heinous or habitual,

3. Whenever we run into Presumptuous Sins, the fault is our own, and God is not to be blamed for not preventing and restraining us. He has made us rational creatures, has given us the direction of his Law, is ready to assist us with his Spirit, and does always what is sufficient on his part, to prevent our sins. We are not destined unavoidably to commit any sin, although we are not so violently overpowered, as to be restrained from committing some sins, that we presumptuously and wilfully run into.

4. We are taught from hence not to depend upon our own sincerity, or good intentions, our own caution, or resolution, or any thing else, so far, as to neglect our prayers to God, that he would keep us back from Presumptuous Sins. Whatever we do else, that may be advised, this is never to be neglected; for our defence consists intirely  
in

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in the Presence and Protection of God's Spirit, which we cannot expect, unless we constantly pray, that he would not desert us, but, by his blessed influence upon us, and his powerful restraints of our ghostly enemies, he would keep us *back from Presumptuous Sins*, that they may not *have dominion over us*.

S E R-





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SERMON XV.

THE

*Christian* WARFARE.

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SERMON. XV.



Christian Warfare

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## S E R M O N   X V .

EPH. vi. 11, 12.

11. *Put on the whole armour of GOD,  
that ye may be able to stand against  
the wiles of the Devil.*

12. *For we wrestle not against flesh and  
blood, but against principalities and  
powers, against the rulers of the  
darkness of this world, against spi-  
ritual wickedness in high places.*

**T**HE holy Scriptures, if considered as compositions, with regard to their contrivance and conduct, appear with very great advantage to those that examine them by the rules which the most judicious critics have laid down. In the Old Testament and New, the poetry and history, the doctrines and the precepts, the motives and



the arguments, are such as become the most improved and finished authors. The epistles of *St. Paul* have the finest passages, which are equal, if not superior, to what are to be met with in any other author. There is not such a profusion of flowers as is found in some heathen writers; but, take them all together, and consider them with relation to the end they aim at, the instruction of mankind in the most important concerns, and nothing is wanting to make them in this respect worthy the pen of an inspired apostle. Amongst a multitude of other excellencies, there are such allusions as at once shew much reading, observation, and ingenuity. He was very well read in the oracles of God, the Scriptures of the Old Testament; the history of the *Jews*, their opinions, and worship, and customs, were familiar to him. Nor was he a stranger to the oracles of reason, the books that were writ by heathen authors. He understood the religion of the *Gentiles*, their customs and manners. And all this knowledge discovers itself in the frequent allusions that we find dispersed among his writings, which are pointed at the temple and the synagogue

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of the *Jews*, the superstition and idolatry of the heathens, the games and sacrifices, the laws and institutions, both of one and the other.

In this passage before us, the apostle considering that there at that time were, and in future times would be, wars and commotions, that parties and nations would rise up in arms against each other; he takes his figures from the state of things, and spiritualizes that art which was invented for the destruction of the body, into arguments and directions that might promote and secure the salvation of the soul.

The observation to be made from the words in general is this; "That the state of CHRIST's church here upon earth is militant." Under which observation I will consider,

I. What enemies Christians have to encounter: And,

II. For what prize they are to contend.

I. What enemies Christians have to encounter.

Now this we learn from our Christian vow, or the solemn engagement under which we are laid when we are lifted under the banner of our LORD, and promise to renounce the devil and all his works, &c. where we are taught, *first*, that the grand adversary is the devil, and his associates; *secondly*, that their auxiliaries are the world and the flesh.

*First*, The grand adversary is the devil. Though it may seem unnecessary to enter into the minute consideration of the existence and nature, the power, malice, and subtlety of the devil; yet, as my subject leads me to say something of it, I shall in so doing have a regard to the two extremes into which men have run as to these points; some making much less, and others much more, of them than they ought to do.

There was an atheistical philosopher in the last century, who did what he was able to explode the doctrine of the Scriptures about the existence of devils, and taught his disciples that they were no real beings; but either diseases in the mind, or phantasms in the brain, or bad principles and inclinations in the heart of man: and the tares which he sowed have hardly yet been rooted out.

For

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For though the *Leviathan* be laid asleep, and his other books have not delicacy and spirit enough to recommend them to the taste of a refined age, yet too many have imbibed his notions, and set them off with as much advantage as their sense and address could give them. Many are to be met with who are great infidels as to this article of demons or evil spirits, notwithstanding the universal tradition of all ages and nations without exception. If we consult either profane or sacred story, we shall find numberless proofs of their existence. The Scripture speaks of evil angels as it does of good, representing them as real beings distinct from men, and ascribing personal actions and properties to them. It speaks of one who in the form of a serpent deceived our first parents; of one who stood up against *Israel*, and provoked *David* to number the people, 1 *Chron.* xxi. 1. who tempted our Saviour, *Mat.* iv. 3, &c.; who entered into *Judas Iscariot*, *Luke* xxii. 9. who put it into his heart to betray his Master, *John* xiii. 2.; who filled the heart of *Ananias* to lie to the Holy Ghost, *Acts* v. 3.; of one who is the prince and chief of the devils, *Matth.* ix. 34. and xii. 24. of one



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who is called *the prince of this world*, John xii. 31.; of one who is *God of this world*, and *who blinds the eyes of infidels*, 2 Cor. iv. 4.; who has his *throne*, Rev. ii. 13.; his *angels*, Rev. xii. 7.; his *synagogue and temple*, Rev. viii. 9.; 1 Cor. viii. 10.; his *priests and prophets*, 2 Kings xi. 18.; 2 Peter ii. 1.; his *altars and sacrifices*, Exod. xxxiv. 13.; of one *whose works Christ came to destroy*, 1 John iii. 8.; of one who is called *the angel of the bottomless pit*; whose name in one language is *Abaddon*, and in another *Apol-lyon*, Rev. ix. 11.; of one who is called the *tempter*, Matth. iv. 3.; and the *accuser of the brethren*, Rev. xii. 9, 10; when they speak of the evil one by way of eminence.

This being the plain language of Scripture, the same that it uses in speaking of good angels, or of either good or bad men, and their several characters and actions, what a task would it be to resolve all into allegory? By the rules observed on this occasion, might the same turn be given to the whole history of the Bible, to all the histories of any people, to the story of any prince or conqueror. *Alexander* may be brought down  
from

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from a *person* to a *quality*, and mean only the noble spirit of the *Macedonians*. *Cæsar* no more than the genius of the *Roman* people. Nay, the wars themselves might be interpreted to signify nothing but the difference there was between the inclination of one people and another; and the famous battles recorded by the greatest historians, no more than school-disputes and trials of skill betwixt the philosophers of *Greece* and *Persia*, or of *Gaul* and *Italy*. But this is a very fanciful way of proceeding, which, if it was allowed, would not only sap the foundation of religion, but quite destroy the faith of history.

The story of the first temptation; the enmity that GOD put betwixt the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent; the opposition that wicked spirits have raised against GOD; the accounts we have of their polity and government; the tyranny and cruelty which they have exercised; the examples of those who were tempted by them; the just sentence of GOD inflicted upon them; the judgment to which they are now reserved in chains; the very purpose of our Saviour's manifestation; the solemn engage-

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ments that all Christians ever entered into when lifted under CHRIST; all the sacred story, and the whole history of the church, is one continued proof of the existence of such beings. Beings, I say; for though the Scriptures speak of the *devil* as of one particular or individual spirit, yet the whole company of evil spirits is to be understood by that word, unless where some one is mentioned as executing some particular commission, or employed to do some particular mischief. Many of them fell by pride and rebellion from the happy state in which they were created, and have ever since made it their business to tempt mankind, and involve as many as possible in the same perdition and ruin with themselves. These, like ravenous beasts of prey, are continually *ranging about, seeking whom they may devour*: and what makes our danger the greater, they have the subtlety of serpents as well as the rage of lions. But what should most alarm us is, he is called *the prince of this world*, and sometimes *the god of this world*; as if the world, that lay in wickedness in the times of the apostles (and I wish we could not say the same

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same in these times also), was by conquest made a province of his empire, and subject to his tyranny.

In what way and manner they execute their wicked purposes we should not be too positive in determining; how far they can work upon our senses, imaginations, or affections: how far by inward suggestions, how far by outward impressions, we cannot precisely say; we are too fatally convinced of the thing itself, though we be ignorant of the manner in which it is done. It may suffice, that after the testimony of the Scriptures as to facts without number, our own sad experience makes it but too notorious, that they do tempt us, and thereby discover at once their hatred of all that is good, and the envy with which they must resent both the honour paid to God, and the happiness reserved for good men. These our spiritual enemies, being of a rank in the order of the creation superior to man, and so much degenerated from all that is good, must have both capacity and inclination to do more hurt than we can determine. Were they permitted to act according to the extent of their  
power,



power, they would soon throw the natural and moral parts of the creation into the utmost confusion; wretched and deplorable would our condition be; our minds, bodies, and fortunes, would soon feel the effects of their rage and malice; our delusion, distraction, and ruin, would soon be their sport and diversion. But it is happy for us, that the good angels are charged with our protection, and are both able and ready to counterplot them, to discover and defeat their most subtle stratagems, and defend us from all their assaults.

The power of the Almighty is also the defence of the righteous. And therefore, as some believe too little, so others should be cautioned against the contrary extreme of imputing things to the devil, which are intirely to be ascribed to a more immediate cause. He is represented in the parable, *Luke* viii. 5. as practising upon us in the most sacred places and services; but he only succeeds upon such as are careless and negligent in temptations, and are of dispositions fit for his purpose. Those that mark what they hear, endeavour to digest it, and make a right

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right use of it; those that raise their minds to God, and keep their thoughts intent upon what they are about, will be preserved from his attempts. The God of all goodness will not suffer him to have such access to them as to inject evil thoughts when they are engaged in these solemnities, if they give not way to foreign images, and faithfully endeavour, by attention and fervency, to keep alive in themselves a true spirit of devotion. But if, after all, we are troubled with wild and wandering thoughts, which we cannot reject, and are unable to govern, we should not add to our trouble by ascribing them to a wrong cause, or concluding them displeasing to God. These are not to be esteemed our faults, but the misfortunes, or at most the infirmities, of this wretched state, to be slighted rather than lamented, incident to the best of Christians, and for which we shall never be accountable, because they are not subject to our own power; nor are they to be imputed either to the insinuations of the devil, or the corruptions of our own hearts, but rather to our unfortunate constitutions, and no otherwise temptations

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temptations than as they are exercises of our constancy and patience.

Others there are who charge this their grand adversary with every bad thing, as if we should never do amiss, unless thro' his wicked insinuations. Now, though he be the author and origin of evil, malicious enough to design, and always ready to execute any mischief, were he not restrained by a superior and most friendly power; yet in many cases he spares himself the trouble of interposing, having agents and instruments under him, who can do the work as well as he. For as these evil spirits are not permitted to exert their native force in their attempts upon us, but are laid under such restrictions as to their personal assaults, they are obliged very much to rely upon their confederates, commit their cause to their management, and find their account in their alliance. Their situation is so convenient for the service, and their method of attacking us so well adapted to our nature and condition, that their work is carried on with great success in a less suspected way, by such instruments as frequently promote their interest beyond their own intention.

Now

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Now these auxiliaries are one without us, which is the world, and another within us, our wicked hearts and natures. The power and honours, the profits and pleasures, the things and persons of this world, are the instruments which the great tempter uses to fright or flatter us into sinful neglects or excesses. After our LORD's ascension it besieged his disciples with great fury, raised its batteries, and thundered out its terrors; tried all the methods of merciless rage to oblige them to surrender: it afterwards preached all its arts and stratagems to deceive them. It now tempts us with its glory, displays its charms, dazles us with its pomp and vanity, delights us with its wealth and luxury, courts us with its vain shew and splendor, lays siege to our hearts, insinuates itself into our affections, flatters us with the hopes of all the pleasures which ease and plenty, power and honour, can furnish out to render the present life desirable and delightful. And it is not seldom observed, that those who are proof against pain are captivated with pleasure: those who are too inflexible to be terrified and forced, are sometimes too easy to be soothed and flattered. One way

or



or the other, it commonly proves successful. By strength, or by subtlety, it leads multitudes captive, extends the empire of sin to all parts of the globe, and subjects this world to the tyranny of hell.

But altho' the world, and the devil, are both very formidable, yet there is another still more dangerous enemy, and that is the flesh, our own bad hearts, and degenerate natures. This enemy is within us, it is even a part of us, and most insidiously betrays us into the hands of other enemies without us. It appears as a friend; and what friend can be nearer than ourselves? Its interest seems the same with our own. What it desires seems so natural, that we are too apt to think it reasonable. To oppose it, is like fighting against ourselves; and what contest can be more unnatural? To conquer it, is to subdue ourselves, and to become voluntary captives. Such reflections as these made the apostle cry out, *O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from this body of sin and death?* He was proof against pain and pleasure, the terrors and charms of the world. He was prepared to *repel the fiery darts of the wicked*. His armour defended him from all his enemies without; but, alas! he found

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found one no less dangerous within. Perhaps an extraordinary degree of supernatural grace was afforded to defend him from the other; but he was left more to himself in coping with this. Fasting, and prayer, and watchfulness, and patience, and resolution, were necessary to subdue this intestine enemy: and as himself was to be conqueror, so he himself was to be captive; one part of this wretched man was to take up arms against the other. A difficulty this, which threw him into such distress, that he most passionately cries out, *what would become of him! who or what should deliver him from that body of sin*, which was siding with the world and the devil; which made him quite unsafe to be left in his own hands? And where should he find a friend, where a deliverer, that would be more tender of his interest, and more solicitous for his security, than he himself must be? Now this is a case not peculiar to any person or time, but common to all mankind in every age, since the law of God was violated by our first parents.

These being the enemies that we have to encounter, let us, in the next place, consider the prize for which we are to contend. And  
this

this is our virtue and innocence, our peace and happiness, our very souls, and everlasting life and glory. We are not to contend for the things of this world. Should we quit our honours, part with our liberties, surrender our possessions, and sacrifice our lives, to purchase peace with our spiritual enemies, it would be rejected, or treacherously accepted. We do not contend for any temporal or worldly power or privileges, rights or properties. We fight not for the preservation or enlargement of any earthly territories and dominions, to extend our trade and commerce. Titles to crowns and sceptres, or the violation of leagues and treaties, are not the causes of our taking up arms, and engaging in these spiritual conflicts. Let these be the occasions of civil wars; let these be the prizes and provocations that call armies into the field, and draw the sword of contending nations. The prize for which we fight is no less than eternal life and glory. Our enemies attack our virtue, and we are to maintain our innocence. They would make us slaves and vassals, and we are to assert our liberty and freedom. The consequence of this spiritual warfare is no less than everlasting

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lasting honour and glory, and happiness, if we come off conquerors; or eternal shame and misery, if we are baffled and defeated. Chaplets of immortality, which will never fade, shall crown us, if we gain the victory; but endless torture and despair must be our doom, if we throw down our arms, or turn them against our Saviour and Sovereign.

This is the prize for which we are to contend, these the enemies that we have to encounter; enemies which will never be brought to any honourable terms with us, are never to be trusted by us; with whom if we begin to treat, and make any offers of accommodation, we raise up an enemy infinitely more to be feared than all these, the great God, *who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell-fire.* There are no neutrals in the war that is carried on betwixt the powers of light and darkness: laying down our arms against these, is taking them up against heaven.

It concerns us then to fight it out; for if we yield, we consent to our own ruin, and are accessory to our own perdition. It behoves us to consider the case we are in; to



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be jealous of the devil and the world, and to watch the motions of our hearts. Let us but secure these, and as the other cannot, so God will not hurt us. No: He will be our Friend and Confederate, and under his auspicious influence and conduct we may assure ourselves of victory.

SERMON

# SERMON XVI.

THE

*Christian* WARFARE.

The Christian Warfare. Sermon  
by the Rev. John W. ...  
... of ...  
...  
...  
...  
...  
...

# SERMON XVI.



Christian Warfare. Sermon.

I have already observed ...  
that Christianity is a warfare ...  
that the prize for which we are contending is ...  
eternal life and glory; that the enemies ...  
which we are to encounter are the ...  
his anxieties. That this is the ...

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## S E R M O N XVI.

EPH. VI. 14, 15, 16, 17, 18.

14. *Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breast-plate of righteousness.*
15. *And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace.*
16. *Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked.*
17. *And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God;*
18. *Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereto with all perseverance.*

**I** Have already observed from this passage, that Christianity is a state of warfare; that the prize for which we are to contend is eternal life and glory; that the enemies with which we are to encounter are the devil and his auxiliaries. That this is the doctrine of



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Scripture, appears both from the Old and New Testament. That it is the doctrine of our Church, is plain from several parts of our Service, as well as from the office of Baptism, wherein the baptized persons renounce all these enemies, enter into the service of their Redeemer; and when the minister is ordered to sign them with the sign of the *Cross*, in token that they shall never be ashamed to confess the faith of CHRIST crucified, &c.

If any, after all that has been said, want to be convinced of the reality of the grand adversary, we must refer them to the future state, where the scene will be changed, and the existence of spirits, both good and bad, will be as evident as the existence of bodies now are.

Let us, in the next place, proceed to acquaint ourselves with the armour which we are to put on.

Now, as there is outward armour both for ornament and use, offensive and defensive; so the apostle here recommends to us spiritual armour, with which to oppose our  
ghostly

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ghostly enemies, and to defend us from their most furious assaults. The inventions and discoveries of latter times have added other parts of armour, but those here mentioned were all the necessary and essential parts of it known and used in the apostle's time, and all that is still necessary for the Christian soldier in his spiritual warfare; the explanation of which is the next part of my design.

Now the particulars here recommended by the apostle are these :

- I. The girdle of truth.
- II. The breastplate of righteousness.
- III. Feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace.
- IV. The shield of faith.
- V. The helmet of salvation.
- VI. The sword of the Spirit.

And to all these he exhorts them to add Prayer and Vigilance, to be constantly upon their guard, to have their hearts fixed upon G O D, and to make their constant application to heaven for those succours that will enable them to persevere to the end, and bring them off not only with security, but also

with honour and reputation. These are the articles upon which I shall now proceed to insist, and open and recommend in the most plain and practical manner.

I. They are exhorted to stand, having their loins girt about with truth; adorned and fortified with the consideration and belief of the gospel, which will make them active and vigorous in every encounter. To keep its great truths in their thoughts, will add much to their strength and dexterity, and be the means of keeping their ground, and convincing the enemy of the vanity of his attempts upon them. Nor was this exhortation then only necessary in the times of persecution, but may even be applied to Christians of all ages: for the serious consideration of the principles of Christianity will ever make them very ready in resolving doubts, silencing groundless fears, directing themselves and others, and answering every argument in behalf of vice and infidelity.

II. They are directed to put on the breastplate of righteousness; to stand clear of guilt and scandal; to approve themselves to God, by the conscientious discharge of every duty; and so to habituate themselves to the  
exercise

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exercise of piety and virtue, as that things of a different stamp may find no place in their affections. The primitive Christians found the great usefulness of this part of their armour; and so shall we. Righteousness will give us such a character, that the devil will be afraid, and the world ashamed, to attack us; for *who will harm us, if we be followers of that which is good?* When we are exercised in virtue, temptations cannot fasten upon us. To stand clear of all iniquity, to be conscious of no wilful vice or folly, will render us as secure and confident as a brazen wall, or the most impregnable fortress. The darts may strike against this breastplate, but they must fall harmless and unsuccessful.

III. They are advised to have their feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; the Gospel which speaks peace to penitents, which recommends peace to all men. Nor was this admonition more necessary, when the apostle recommended it to the *Ephesians*, than it is still. For a peaceable temper makes all easy within, and frustrates the rage and fury of the enemy without. We shall proceed in pursuit of the enemy with most ease, and most expedition,



dition, when our feet, that are most exposed, are thus secured against all those impediments which the enemy throws in our way to hinder our progress, and make us quit the pursuit out of delicacy, fatigue or despondency.

IV. When they have surmounted these difficulties, and are in close pursuit of the enemy; as there may be some danger of his rallying his forces, and repeating the attack, they are admonished, in the next place, *above all, to take the shield of faith, wherewith they may be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked.*

When they believe in CHRIST, rely upon his merits and intercession, fear his threats, and depend upon his promises, their armour is then impenetrable.—By this shield were persons of both sexes, and all ages and conditions, defended against the assaults of their enemies, in the times of the hottest persecutions. It was all in vain that the devil used his utmost policy, armed all the powers of the world against them, and practised upon the enemy within to betray them. The fury of their own lusts and passions was abated by abstinence and fasting, and reflecting

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reflecting upon the great truths revealed in the gospel. The hearts of their persecutors melted within them, to see them with so much courage and resolution charge on in the midst of swords, and rocks, and flames, not to be overcome by all the instruments of cruelty that could be invented to torment them. They so abated the poison, and quenched the heat of the darts to which they stood exposed, that they even converted them into the means of the most glorious triumphs. And faith has still the same virtue: think of any temptation, and consider what arguments it uses to prevent our compliance; think of any duty, and consider what motives it uses to engage us to practise it; think of all the threats or promises, terrors or allurements, of the enemy, and faith will render them all ineffectual. To see by faith the joys of heaven to encourage our virtue and piety, and the torments of hell to deter us from sin and iniquity, will baffle and overcome the most powerful temptations. The sharpest darts dipt in the most dreadful poison cannot hurt us. The effects of faith are not seen only in the outward man, but they reach the very soul. It is  
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not its business to polish a man outwardly, but to perfect him by degrees, and make him good inwardly and thoroughly. Faith lays the soul open to receive its Saviour, and his Holy Spirit to enlighten and reform it; makes us truly sensible of our own native ignorance and blindness, of our guilt and degeneracy, of our weakness and imperfections, of our miserable, lost, and ruined state; of the absolute necessity of being renewed, regenerated, reformed, and restored to the state in which we were first created, to the favour of GOD, and a capacity of being acceptable to him, and happy with him. When we are sensible, that there is every thing in CHRIST that we can desire, light and wisdom, righteousness and purity, holiness and perfection, that he is able to make us what we should be, and as happy as we would be; when we fly from ourselves and the world, and trust in, and rely upon nothing but CHRIST, and give up ourselves to him, to be taught and assisted, to be ruled and saved, by him; we are out of all danger: whilst we keep close to him, have him in our eye, and our hearts dwell in him, and he in us, are one with him, and he with us; he must be either  
ruined



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ruined with us, or we must be saved with him. Since therefore faith makes men new creatures, quite changes their natures, transforms them into the image of God and their Saviour, irradiates their minds with the light of heaven, inspires them with new principles and passions, new appetites and desires; gives them a new taste, turn, and tendency; gradually disengages the soul from all that is gross and earthly; resolves it to its proper spring, and carries it up towards its own native regions; well may faith be said to extinguish all the fiery darts of the wicked.

V. Another part of our Christian armour is the helmet of salvation. To look up to heaven, and to see myriads of saints and martyrs crowned with chaplets of glory, encompassed with inconceivable felicity, secured from any further attacks of the enemy; to see our blessed Saviour upon his throne, holding out a crown of glory as the prize of our victory; a crown as much preferable to any earthly diadem, as a blessed immortality is to this present life; must needs awaken all our powers, rouse our spirits, and animate us in the combat so to fight



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fight, as that we may conquer, and obtain all the glory and happiness that is promised to those that overcome. When we see the gates of heaven set open to receive us, what difficulty will not give way? what temptation will not vanish? what shall we fear to lose, if we are to be admitted there? The hopes of eternal happiness as the end will reconcile us to any thing as the *means*, and especially to that which is its own reward, and carries along with it the greatest engagements and allurements, I was going to say, temptations, to practise it.

VI. To finish all, they are exhorted to take the sword of the Spirit, *which is the word of God*. With this weapon our Saviour repelled the temptation of the devil: and though he would needs be so hardy as to fight our LORD at the same weapon, and to quote Scripture upon him; yet he did it so much from the purpose, that he had the wisdom to desist, and try another: so if we from the Scriptures draw out arguments against him, urging better promises than he can make, and more terrible threats than he can use; if we keep close to its directions,

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and confront the power of hell with the authority of heaven; it will be a most effectual way to silence him; and put him to flight. Errors and vices are void of all defence and support, when brought to the touchstone of the Scriptures. The word of God is a weapon with which a skilful hand will make such a defence; and give such an opposition, as no enemy will be able to withstand; the word of eternal wisdom, truth, and goodness, must needs silence all that is said in support of error, vice, or folly.

Now, that all this armour may be used with more success, the apostle recommends Prayer, and Vigilance, and Perseverance; and that both on their own account, and also for all that are engaged in the same warfare with them. *Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance.* Common prudence will direct us to solicit what forces we can in our own favour, when we are not otherwise able to cope with the enemy. By Prayer we engage God in our interest; and, when he is on our side, we need  
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not fear what the enemy can do against us. When CHRIST and his Holy Spirit strengthen us, no enemy can stand before us. Prayer has a kind of omnipotence in it, as it engages GOD in our favour, who knows no difficulty, but can do whatever is needful and possible to be done.

Besides all this armour, and the aids of the most fervent Prayer, they are also admonished to be upon their guard, always to suspect the enemy, and to be vigilant and watchful, lest he surprise them. The motions of their hearts, and the thoughts and words that flow from them, were to be strictly attended to. The world, with all its enchantments, was to be suspected. It was necessary, that they should be sober and vigilant, because their adversary, as a roaring lion, was constantly ranging, and seeking his prey. Sin is treacherous, and often puts on the garb and appearance of virtue, and by this means imposes upon the heedless and unwary. Nay, a thousand arguments conspire to solicit their vigilance; and though the enemy have not the same dreadful appearance now, that he had in the times of per-



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persecution, yet he is the same enemy still, but more improved by so many hundred years experience; and though he attack us in another way, it is because he finds it most successful; though we seem to be in a more composed state, yet our guards are never to be dismissed; we are never safe when we dream of our security; he has a thousand wiles and stratagems, is ever to be suspected, and all his motions to be strictly regarded.

In the last place, as peace was never to be made with these ghostly enemies, so they are exhorted constantly to persevere in hostilities against them: and the same is much to be pressed now; for they will never be reconciled to us, but be always endeavouring to trapan, insnare, and destroy us; they will ever persist in their enmity to God and mankind; and therefore we should resolve never to lay down our arms, but to persevere in our allegiance to the Almighty, and never to grow slack or remiss in our endeavours to repel the enemy. What will it avail us to have got never so many advantages, if we relinquish them all for want of constancy and perseverance? If we hold out



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ever so long, and at last surrender, we must answer for it with our lives to the Prince under whom we serve. For, in this war, submission, though under the greatest pressures and distresses, is downright rebellion and treason. It is he who endures to the end, that shall have the crown of life; but if any one draw back, the LORD will have no pleasure in him.

28 SE60

END of VOL. I.

